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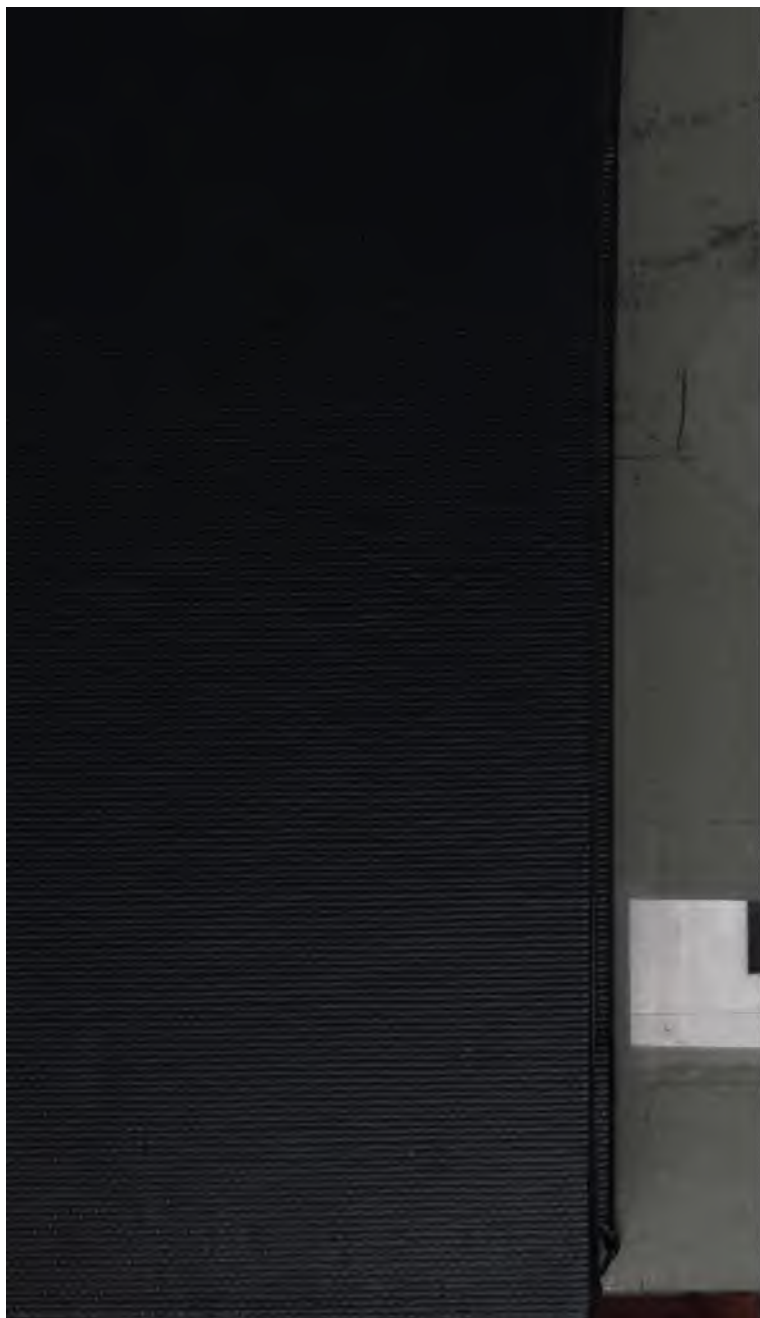
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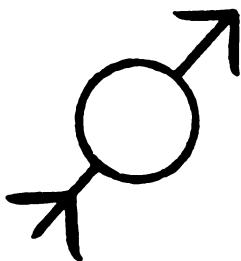
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A STRANGE VOYAGE.

CHAPTER I.

MR. VALENTINE EDWARDS.

ONE day in May, on returning to my chambers in town after a week spent with a married sister, I found the subjoined letter, that had been delivered that morning, awaiting me :—

“Harley Street” (*such and such a date*).

“Dear Mr. Aubyn,—Will you give me the pleasure of your company at lunch here to-morrow at one? My daughter is at Brighton, and you will find me alone. I have a scheme, and am desirous that it should include you.—Very faithfully,

“VALENTINE EDWARDS.”

The writer of this note was member of a club I belong to, and I knew him in that way only. Nevertheless we were well acquainted. Whenever he spied me at the club he would bring a chair close to mine, and he seemed to enjoy a chat with me. He was a retired City merchant, and I had heard him spoken of as a rich man, a widower. I also knew that he had a daughter, an only child, and that he lived in Harley Street. Further, of late I had learnt from him that he was a martyr to rheumatic gout, and could obtain no relief, though he had put himself into the hands of some of the most eminent doctors of the day. And here my knowledge of him terminated. Possibly he knew more of me than I of him, for I was a young man and somewhat candid; and during our many chats I had often opened myself to him, talked to him about my parents, how my money was invested (he once, by the way, gave me a financial hint that proved to be worth five hundred pounds to me), who my connections were—at least, those of them it suited me to name—and so on. He had never before asked me to call upon him, nor had the omission surprised me. We were simply club acquaintances, and that was all.

His note tickled my curiosity. There was nothing odd in his asking me to lunch. The old fellow—he was a man past sixty—was alone, and perhaps dull ; and casting about him for some one to help him kill an hour, he had thought of me. But then that was not it. He had a scheme, and what it could be set me bothering my wits. Was he going to start a company, and did he want me to take shares, or to be a director? I recoiled from the thought. I was tolerably well-to-do, and from my youth had hated business as I hated poison.

But conjecturing was idle work. I was not so sensitive as to feel that my eating his lunch would make a blank refusal to join in any scheme I did not care about difficult ; and as I had nothing to do next day, I sent him an answer in which I accepted his invitation with much pleasure.

I found Mr. Edwards's house to be one of the best in Harley Street ; as much as I saw of it was very sumptuously furnished, and the walls of the dining-room were covered with pictures of value and beauty. My friend was a tall, large man, with a round face and several layers of chins, which rolled down the opening in his shirt-collars like the swell of the sea into a gully. He had black eyes and grey hair and strips of grey whiskers ; he wore a couple of immense gold rings on his fingers, one of them blazing with a diamond, and in other respects he was expensively dressed and embellished. He looked, indeed, a portly, happy, good-tempered, rich, retired City man, perfectly satisfied with himself, and therefore qualified to take a complacent view of life.

He received me in his library, rising from his chair with a grimace, and was about to extend his right hand ; but he exclaimed "No, I dare not trust it ; you must let me give you my left hand."

"Do you find your gout worse?" I asked.

"Why, yes," he replied, "because you see it doesn't grow better. Look at these knuckles, Mr. Aubyn ; did you ever see such swellings? And the pain ! Upon my word, there are times—at bed-times—when I feel as if I were being skinned alive, the operating fiend making it a rule to begin at one of the joints. I wish I had no joints. I can submit to being reminded now and then of a knuckle, or even an ankle ; but day after day to be made to feel that one is *all* bone—!"

"What do the doctors call it?" said I.

"Rheumatic gout, and be hanged to them !" he replied, speaking with a jolly grin, and revealing a set of glittering false teeth. "It's come to this, Mr. Aubyn," said he, with a glance round his handsome library as if he doubted whether I should be able to reconcile his statement with what I saw : "life grows burdensome. *I am blessed with wonderfully good spirits, but they are not proof against incessant pain.* If it isn't in my neck, where, when I'm

abed and wake up and turn my head on the pillow, I feel as if there were a corkscrew in each eyeball—if it isn't there, sir, it's in my shoulder, with a sensation as if three or four dockyard labourers had got hold of my arms, and were being bribed with cans of bitter beer to wrench it off. If it isn't in my shoulder it's in my feet, and I feel as if I were walking on the stumps of amputated limbs; and when it leaves my feet it takes refuge in the small of my back, where my spine seems to be shortened by six inches, so that, to use the nautical language, I'm obliged to look aloft like a hen after taking a drink of water. It is my pleasure to be happy, Mr. Aubyn; but I tell you rheumatic gout makes good spirits things very difficult to maintain—very difficult indeed."

Nevertheless he burst into a fairly hearty laugh, in which I not ungratefully joined, for his recital of his sufferings, coupled with his ample, good-humoured face, proved a severe strain on my gravity. At this point a man-servant announced lunch; and getting up with a groan, and then cautiously rearing his large figure, as though feeling his road through a tangled growth of twinges and shootings into an erect posture, Mr. Edwards led the way to the dining-room.

At the start we talked of anything but the scheme which he had asked me to lunch to speak about. He ate very heartily, considering he was gouty, and to my amazement drank port.

"I always thought that wine was the worst stuff a man suffering from your complaint could drink!" I exclaimed.

"And that was my notion too," said he. "For six months not a drop of it passed my lips. But I found myself no better, and being very fond of port, I asked myself why, since abstinence found me as badly off at the end as at the beginning—why should I add an intellectual pang to my physical sufferings by the remorseful recollection of pleasure abandoned for no purpose? So I took to it again," said he, with his large and amusing smile; "and," he continued, filling his glass afresh, "view every bumper I take as a valuable contribution to pathology, as proving the doctors wrong."

He drank and smacked his lips with a wonderful air of relish, and tenderly eyed the wine that remained in the glass before putting it down.

"Has any doctor ever thought of recommending you to try a sea voyage?" said I. "I have heard of many cures of rheumatism—I won't say of gout—by sea air. Only, a man, I believe, must spend some weeks on the ocean to benefit from it."

"Mr. Aubyn," he replied, "your remark brings us exactly to the point. You have touched upon the very scheme I want to talk to you about."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed, staring at him, and wondering what on earth any scheme *having* reference to a sea voyage could have to do *with me*.

"You know something about the sea, I believe?"

"Not very much," I answered, laughing.

"Didn't I once understand you to say you had been at sea?"

"Yes; in this way. When I was a lad, a schoolboy, I was mad to be a sailor. There was no occasion for me to choose or think of any profession; but for all that I determined to be a sailor. I gave my parents no peace, and threatened to run away if they baulked me. They saw that I was in earnest, and my father, perceiving no other way to cure me of my nautical longings, went to work to give me heaviest dose of the sea that could be administered. He sent me a voyage to the West Indies in a small brig. The skipper had received his cue, as I afterwards learnt, and the result was six months of the most abominable life mortal boy ever had to endure. I slept in the fore-castle," I continued, warming over these recollections, "waited upon the men, who repaid me with kicks and blows and curses, had to do every dirty job that was to be done, greasing, cleaning, even helping the cook in the galley; my hand was seldom out of the slush-bucket; but no matter what work I was at, nor how well I was doing it, the captain and mate made a point of storming at me for my laziness. Six months of it I had; and I never can think of the first week, the head seas, the bitter head winds, the cold, the stench and gloom of the fore-castle, the horrors of going aloft—sick to death, in the darkness, my fingers frozen—to help to furl or reef the canvas, without amazement that I should have survived it. It was my first and last voyage," said I; "and all, therefore, that I know about the sea—little enough to remember after all these years—I learnt in those six months."

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Edwards, "I was pretty sure you had been to sea, and I was also under the impression that though you had quitted the life you were very fond of it."

"Of the sea, yes; but not of the life."

"No, no, not of the life, but of the sea. Let me tell you my scheme. I have been recommended by a friend—not a doctor—to take a voyage. He guarantees that it will cure me. I must do something, Mr. Aubyn. I can't go on suffering and getting worse. The sea has no particular charms for me. I'm a poor sailor, and waves and clouds, I fancy, must be things which easily bore a man. But if the ocean cures me, if it only takes the aching out of my bones and the swelling out of my joints, I shall love it, I shall respect it very honestly, I assure you."

"Have you made up your mind to go?"

"Oh dear, yes; everything is arranged, but our party wants completing: will you make one of us?"

"You are very good," said I. "The invitation takes me somewhat by surprise. Will you give me some particulars? Do you sail in a yacht?"

"No," he answered, in a ship; in what you would call a full-rigged ship."

"Oh, then," I exclaimed, "I suppose you will take passage in one of the ordinary liners?"

"There again you guess wrongly," he said, laughing. "I'll tell you in a jiffy how the case stands. My friend Hornby is a small shipowner. Among the vessels he is interested in is a little full-rigged ship named the *Silver Sea*. Shortly after I had been earnestly recommended to try a voyage for my complaint, I met Hornby, and told him I had half a mind to go to sea for a few weeks. 'Edwards,' said he, 'strangely enough, do you know, I have partly formed the same intention. I feel stale for the want of a breeze of wind and a wide horizon. If you go, I will. And I'll tell you what,' said he; 'I have a ship lying in the South-West India Dock which will make us as snug and safe a sea home as any mortal could want for a few weeks; and if you'll provision her for the run, and pay the wages, and take me with you, you shall have the use of her for six months for *mix*.'"

"Nothing could be more liberal," said I. "Is she for sale, or lying by for want of a cargo?"

"I fancy she must be for sale," he replied, "to judge from this cutting that he sent me, and which is apparently part of an advertisement." He pulled out his pocket-book and extracted a piece of paper; then put on his glasses, looked at it, and handed it to me. It was a portion of an advertisement cut from a shipping journal, and pasted on a sheet of note-paper. Thus it ran:—

"The handsome clipper ship *Silver Sea*, 700 tons register. Built, under special survey, of oak and teak, regardless of cost, by her owner, Mr. WELLESLEY HORNBV, expressly for his own use, in 18—, and classed 17 years A1 at Lloyd's; is copper-fastened and newly sheathed with yellow metal; carries well; has iron lower masts and bowsprit, and is wire-rigged fore and aft; she has been employed in the Australian passenger trade, and has made some exceedingly fast passages. She was thoroughly salted during construction, and having been always well maintained is now in splendid order."

"All this reads very well," said I, returning the paper to Mr. Edwards. "Have you seen the ship?"

"Yes," he answered. "I'll tell you about her presently. Finish your wine, and we'll go into the next room for a cigar."

We repaired to the library, which I discovered Mr. Edwards used as a smoking-room also. In glancing round the apartment during the pause occasioned by the entrance of a man-servant with cigars and a pipe and jar of tobacco for his master, I found my eyes fastening upon a picture that I had not taken notice of before. It hung on the right of the chimney near the window, the curtain of which shadowed it, so that to see it clearly I approached it.

"A pretty painting, Mr. Aubyn," said Mr. Edwards. "Jenkins, hold the curtain away that the picture may be seen."

The man drew the curtain aside, and the afternoon light fell fairly upon the portrait. It represented an exceedingly handsome girl, a brunette, with a rich colour in her cheeks, the eyes black and brilliant, the mouth like a rose, and coils of ebony tresses wound round on top of her head with some kind of rich jewel fixed on the left side. The face was three-quarters, the eyes looking at you. The figure was represented to below the waist, and was a most perfect shape, clothed in black velvet.

"A charming portrait, Mr. Edwards," I exclaimed, viewing it with unaffected admiration.

"My daughter, Margaret," said the old fellow proudly. "That'll do, Jenkins; you can go. It's an excellent piece of colouring, I am told; and it ought to be excellent, for I paid the artist, Mr. Wilkins Montebello, R.A., eight hundred guineas for it."

"When was it taken?"

"Last year."

"Then that is Miss Edwards as she is?"

"Yes, as she is—twelve months don't work much change at her time of life," said he, peering at the painting from his chair.

"Any look of me, d'ye think, about her?"

"Why, yes," I replied; "there's a family likeness, no doubt."

She'll accompany me, and is looking forward to it—at least, I think so," said he, filling his pipe. That'll make two, Hornby three, Colonel and Mrs. Inglefield and their daughter six; and you, if you will join us, will be seven, the number we require to fill the cabins and make a jolly party."

"The *Silver Sea*," said I, still hanging in the wind, for this invitation had taken me utterly by surprise; and though I seemed to find something not disagreeable in the proposed run, more especially since the original of the lovely portrait was to make one of us, I wanted time to think—"the *Silver Sea* has evidently been in the passenger trade, and should therefore serve your turn if she be the staunch and tight and clipper craft she is represented."

"Oh, I have seen her, and there is no doubt of her being all that Hornby declares her. Besides, he is to accompany us. He is an old hand, and his presence on board will guarantee her. You wouldn't catch an owner sailing in a ship he's not sure of; no," continued he, laughing, "not if she were insured for ten times her value. Pray understand that our friends join us as guests."

I bowed. "A most liberal and hospitable invitation indeed. You prefer a ship of this size to a large yacht?"

"There's not a yacht large enough to suit me to be had," he replied. "I go for my health, and I want room, and the security of a vessel that has again and again weathered Cape Horn. Besides, thanks to Hornby, the *Silver Sea* will prove much less expensive to

me than the cost of a yacht of a tonnage fit to make a voyage to the Cape."

"Is *that* your destination?" I exclaimed, with surprise, never dreaming that he would go so far afield.

"Yes and a beautiful voyage it is, I hear," he answered, blowing out a cloud of smoke and looking at his swelled wrist through it; "when once we have passed the Canary Islands we shall be in the tropics for nearly the rest of the voyage. Vertical suns ought to be better than warm fomentations; and if inflamed joints are not to be subdued by equatorial calms, Mr. Aubyn, I'll endeavour to recover my faith in medical opinions."

"How long do you reckon on being away?"

"About four months—a little over that time, perhaps. Call the passage out fifty days, the stay at the Cape fifteen days, and the passage home fifty days; that's a little more than sixteen weeks. Less time would scarcely be of use to me."

"And when do you start, Mr. Edwards?"

"At the end of this month. That will give us June, July, August, and September at sea; and making every allowance for delay, we ought to be comfortably home, brown with tan, and boisterous with rude health, by the middle of October at the very outside."

"Considering she is a clipper, you give her a wide margin. But you are wise to do so. The Doldrums, as they are called, are often bothersome and delaying. Have you assembled a ship's company yet?"

"Hornby has promised to see to that. It will be a jolly trip, don't you think?"

"It'll be the right kind of physic for you; of that I am sure," I replied.

"I shall be sea-sick, of course," he exclaimed, with his broad smile; "but it won't last long, I hope. What time is usually permitted, do you know?"

"Oh, we mustn't conjecture. It will not do to go to sea with the notion that you are to be sea-sick. Shall you carry a doctor?"

"Certainly not!" he cried, with great emphasis. "We embark on this voyage for the purpose of escaping doctors. Carrying one with us would be making mere irony of our determination to seek health and strength, Mr. Aubyn."

I was not so sure of that, but it was not for me to comment upon his programme.

"There'll be neither doctor nor stewardess," he continued; "the ladies will wait upon each other, and that will keep them from quarrelling. My daughter spoke of taking her maid; but I said, 'No, don't set a bad example; there will be three of you, and if you want to take your maid the others will want to take theirs, and the ship will be endangered by three girls getting athwart the *hawse* of the crew, as sailors say, and falling foul of them.' The

cruise is to be treated as a rough picnic, each one for himself, and all the rest for the others. Mrs. Inglefield didn't much relish the notion of being without a maid ; but I was firm."

"You prefer sail to steam?" said I.

"Why, yes," he answered, "because we are not in a hurry. Steam gives you no excuse to linger ; whereas canvas forces you to procrastinate, and you are detained among the salt winds whether you like it or not. Shall I include you among my guests?" he inquired, with a kind of hearty anxiety.

"I have really no excuse to offer for not answering at once," said I ; "nevertheless, I will ask you to give me a day. Four months, you see, Mr. Edwards—it may be five !—I *think* you may count upon me. It's a rare chance, and I thank you much for so large and liberal an offer of enjoyment. I will let you know certainly, one way or the other, to-morrow. Will that do?"

"Very well indeed," he answered. "I know you'll come. We shall have the ship all to ourselves. There'll be a piano on board, no lack of good wines and tobacco : Hornby's an excellent fellow ; and you'll be delighted with the Inglefields. A good stock of books and music will be laid in ; and though, to be sure, we shall start away bound for Cape Town, still, if we choose to change our minds, you know, and make for some other port, why, we can. There's nothing to keep you in England this summer?"

"No."

"No young lady?—excuse my freedom. If you *are* engaged, why, if you'll bring your *affiancée*, we shall all be delighted. We could make room—"

I laughed, and assured him that my heart was still my own, and that when I put my hat on it covered the only individual in the world who had any claim upon me, saving a married sister, on whose account, fortunately for her and me, there was no occasion whatever for me to trouble myself.

"If you have nothing better to do to-morrow," said he, "go down to the South-West India Dock and look at the ship, and judge for yourself. There's a watchman, or shipkeeper, I think he's called, on board," giving me his card ; "show him that, and thoroughly overhaul the vessel. Indeed, I should like to know your opinion of her."

"I have nothing to do to-morrow," said I, "and I will go and see her, and give you my humble judgment in a letter."

"Which I hope will also contain your acceptance of my invitation."

I felt that that was not improbable, especially as at the moment he said this I happened to have my eyes fixed on his daughter's portrait. But to cut short this opening chapter, which you will accept in the light of a necessary preface, I sat talking with Mr. Edwards till about three o'clock, and then left him and walked to

my club, where I remained glancing at the newspapers and thinking over the invitation I had received until it was time to dine.

CHAPTER II.

THE "SILVER SEA."

THE offer of a voyage of four or five months' duration is a rather large matter to spring upon a man in a breath. It is not like a yachting cruise, that keeps the English or Continental ports close aboard, and gives you a chance of catching an express train or a mail boat for home when you have had enough of sailorizing, and want to feel firm land under your heels again. A run to the Cape might mean a passage of two, ay, and perhaps three, months ; a long, slow stretch to the Brazilian coast, and then a slanting track through the south-east trade-wind, with the hindrance of many a storm, perhaps, on the road, to the latitude of the South African headland.

I was tolerably fond of salt water, but certainly not so partial as to care for too much of it. I had been effectually cured in my youth of all nautical hankerings by the voyage I had told Mr. Edwards about, and what I preserved of that bit of education was—first, the names of a ship's rigging, spars, and sails ; next, an invincible horror of salted pork, and certain kinds of preserved meats and soups ; then, the recollection of some lovely day and night sea pictures ; and finally, the memory of a spell of health so wonderful, so exuberant, that neither frost, nor kicks, nor wormy biscuit, nor wet blankets could impair it.

This, I say, was what I got out of that voyage, not to mention my salvation from the marine life ; it left me liking the ocean, but abhorring the profession of it ; and I don't know that it wasn't this disgust that caused me to hesitate over Mr. Edwards's invitation, for there was really nothing to stop me from immediately accepting it : by which I mean that I was a bachelor, a young man of eight-and-twenty, without shore ties of any kind, with nothing to do, and, as it happened, perfectly free in respect of engagements for the summer then approaching or begun. So far as my health was concerned I was very well, and did not apprehend that there was anything in a voyage to the Cape of Good Hope calculated to make me better. Such pleasure as the voyage might yield would entirely lie in the companionship of Mr. Edwards's guests. All were strangers to me excepting the host. But I had his word for it that they were agreeable people, and I could not suppose that he was *likely to associate himself with unpleasant persons during a voyage*

undertaken for his gout—of all complaints the one that, I should think, could least endure depressing or uncomfortable or irritating surroundings.

But though I had hung in the wind when Mr. Edwards first asked me to join his party, I may as well suggest—I do not mind owning it—what afterwards helped me, to a certain extent, to settle my mind to accept. It was indeed the thought that his daughter would be one of us. Somehow the recollection of her portrait grew upon me more and more as I sat thinking over what I should do. There seemed to be a clear promise of pleasure in *her* companionship, any way. To be sure, what I knew of her was just her likeness: the artist may have flattered her; he might have given the black eyes more fire and sweetness than really belonged to them; he may have enriched her figure by lines and curves more beautiful and graceful than those she owned; and the intellectual loveliness of the red mouth might be due to Mr. Wilkins Montebello's determination to earn his eight hundred guineas handsomely. Yet there could be no doubt of there being truth enough in the portrait to swear by; and I confess that I admired it so greatly that the idea of being shut up in a ship with the original of it for four months, if not longer, made the prospect of the salt horizon and the calms and storms it girdles—made the prospect, I say, of passing sixteen weeks in the middle of that circle sufficiently endurable.

The long and short of it was that before it was time to go to bed that night I had made up my mind to join Mr. Edwards's party. But before sending him my acceptance of his invitation it was desirable that I should carry out his programme and inspect the ship.

Accordingly, next morning after breakfast I drove to Fenchurch Street railway station, and was conveyed by rail through the lovely district of Whitechapel to the Isle of Dogs; and here I alighted.

I have often wondered why Londoners, who profess great pride in the Thames, should have retained some of the very vile and evil-sounding terms certain portions of the river below bridge are known by. Mr. Bugsby was no doubt once upon a time a very respectable man; and his wife may have considered his name, on the whole, a poetical one. But to the ear of posterity the sound of the word Bugsby is extremely unpleasant, and there is, therefore, a perpetual offence in the appellation of Bugsby's Reach given to the stretch of Thames water past Blackwall. So of the Isle of Dogs. What more afflicting name could have been invented? Did the set of the tide formerly deposit all the drowned puppies which floated on the river's surface upon this part of the shore? and was that why such a horrid name as the Isle of Dogs was applied to it? Yet I defy you to visit this district and not sympathize with *the fancy of the people* who provided it with its existing nomenclature. I question if all England has to offer a more dismal,

muddy, cold, repulsive scene than is submitted by the stretch of Thames from Limehouse to Blackwall, and by the land on either side. Any one making experiments in the direction of wretchedness should go to the Isle of Dogs on a grey and cheerless day, when the smoke and fog of the metropolis, impelled by a north-westerly wind, envelop the sky over the river, and gaze around him. The water may be alive with shipping, all the interests of the docks—and those interests are great—may be close at hand; but the oppressive influence the place exerts over the mind, the deep dejection induced by mud, by a river of the colour of sailor's soup, thickly and gutturally oozing along, by the melancholy wastes of damp, blank, flat land on the Deptford side, breaks into the spirits through everything, and forces upon one the conviction that the Isle of Dogs must be, without exception, the most cheerless and wretched place upon the face of the globe.

The spirit of this ugly region lay heavy as frost upon me as I quitted the railway station, and made my way to the dock where the *Silver Sea* was lying. The number of large vessels abreast of the wharves and sheds, the wonderful variety of produce that littered the ground, the aromas coming along in whiffs, and suggesting now the coast of Ceylon, now the fragrant Paumotus, and then the roasting heat of the mighty Indies, the rattling of donkey-engines, the hoisting of steam-sheers, the calls and cries of seamen and labourers, made the picture extremely interesting; but the melancholy of the Isle of Dogs was in it, and busy as the scene was, it seemed to me anything but lively.

However, I will not hold the island entirely responsible for the pensiveness the sight of the docks put into me. One cannot but think of these receptacles for ships as places where there is a perpetual sad going and coming, where people return to find empty chairs, and loved and well-remembered faces missing, and where there is the leave-taking between those who shall never clasp hands again. This feeling is accentuated by the spectacle of a ship just about to sail or newly arrived, and slowly hauling in through the gates. In the one case the vessel is spick and span, her sides gay with fresh paint, her sea-gear rove, her colours flying; she emblemizes hope; she is eager and radiant, and she starts with a light heart and to a merry clanking chorus. But see the other! she has been through it, and she is the embodiment of stern experience as she warps sluggishly in with her sides bruised, a mast broken, a boat—like a lost child—gone; her wheel injured, a portion of her bulwarks smashed, her sails rolled up lumpishly, and a look of weariness, of conflict and hard usage, all over her. Sometimes you shall see more of the meaning of human life in a dock than in a crowd.

The walk to the particular dock in which the Silver Sea lay was a short one; I met a customs officer, and asked him to tell me where

she was ; and he pointed to a vessel at the western end of the dock, saying, " You can't mistake her, sir ; she's the prettiest model in the place."

Yes, there could be no doubt of that. I was quick to see it when I had the ship fairly in view. For the full rig she carried she was certainly small—though I have seen a full-rigged ship of five hundred tons—and many, no doubt, would have converted her into a barque. But though she was little for a ship, she was the more elegant and beautiful, I thought, for her rig. I stood looking at her from the quay, past the stern of a large iron steamer, a full ten minutes before I stepped on board. She had been newly sheathed, and the yellow metal that rose high—for she was very light—gleamed dully, like old gold, and the reflection of it in the water resembled a streak of sunshine. Her hull was painted a dark green ; she had an elliptical stern and a lovely schooner bow, with a figure-head composed of a silver ball, meant perhaps by the artist to signify the Silver Sea—in the grasp of what resembled the talons of an eagle. Her top-gallant-masts were aloft, but not the yards ; her jibbooms were rigged in, her lower yards braced that they might be out of the way, so that in all respects she might have been likened to a lady *en déshabille*. But her prettiness shone through her neglected exterior ; you saw it in the slight lean aft of her lower masts and in the graceful stay of the spars above ; in the delicate fabrics of her tops, the moulded sweep and curve of her lines, the airy harmonious rounding of her counter and taffrail, the eager, shearing, dominating look of her cutwater, and in a hundred signs visible to even an unpractised eye.

I could well believe, from the mere outside inspection of her, that she had been a favourite in the colonial passenger trade, though she could not long have been employed in that service, for whilst still a young ship she had been sometime withdrawn from it. As I stood viewing her I thought Mr. Edwards showed a deal of sense in choosing her to go a voyage in, instead of hiring a yacht. She was bound not only to have as good heels, at all events, as the liveliest pleasure craft afloat, but to be as safe and convenient as a strongly built roomy structure of a registered burden of seven hundred tons could be.

I walked round to the quay where she lay, and spied an old red-nosed man in a tall hat, looking over the quarter-deck rail. A couple of planks stretched from her gangway to the quay, and up them I trundled, whilst the old chap came limping forward to know my business. I gave him Mr. Edwards's card, and told him I was to be one of the passengers, and had come to look at the ship.

" All right, sir," said he, with a tug at the rusty brim of his hat, " you'll be having a fine vessel under your feet, sir. A rale beauty he *is*. Step aft till ye see how he opens amidships into a beam just like the run of a lovely faymale when you start from her waist," winking

"and follow the lines up till you come to the shoulders. Oh, my eye!" continued the garrulous old fellow, leading the way aft, "this here wessel is rale shipbuilding, I calls him. A gent and two ladies came aboard last week to view him, and the young lady asked me if I thought the *Silver Sea* safe. Safe! Lard love her! safe! think of it. Murder and onions! give me a gale of wind, sir, something fit to prise the sky out of her moorings, and there's not an isleyand on any ocean in this here bloomin' world, ay, though it was six hundred feet tall, that I wouldn't despise for the security such a ship as this 'ud give me in a storm!"

I echoed the somewhat groggy and greasy laugh this queer old shipkeeper delivered out of his stomach, impressed by hearing, for the first time in my life, a person resembling a mariner speak of a ship as *he*; and coming to a stand near the wheel, took a look forward. I should need to be technical and consequently tiresome to put before you a faithful picture of the *Silver Sea*, and you would not thank me for that. Enough if I say, generally, that she was a flush-decked vessel, with a forecastle for the crew under hatches; so that with the exception of the galley abaft the foremast, to which sea-kitchen there was united small cabin accommodation for the boatswain and carpenter, the length of deck was free from all obstruction. She carried four white boats of a whaling pattern, with brass rowlocks, gratings for the feet, and the owner's flag painted on the bows; and a roomy boat on chocks, athwartships, between the galley and the foremast. All her fittings were first-rate, such as the companion and skylights, the standard and binnacle compasses, and the other numerous objects which make up the deck furniture of a ship.

Meanwhile, the old chap alongside of me jabbered incessantly. Perhaps he dreamed of inducing me to purchase the *Silver Sea*, for he praised her lavishly and extraordinarily.

"You appear to know all about her," said I. "Upon my word, your fluency is enough to make me suspect that there must be something wrong with her."

"I don't know nothing about *flooney*," he replied, evidently objecting to the word, whilst the crimson of his nose appeared to sharpen; "but if there's anything wrong in this here lovely craft, with his spars," he continued, casting his little eyes aloft till they met in a squint, "so beautiful that it's like readin' poetry to keep your gaze fixed on 'em, and everything so fust class for style, strength, and hornamentation, that there's many a nobleman would be glad to pay fifty pound down for lave to view 'em and get ideas for the decoration of his yacht—if there's anything wrong—"

"Oh, there's nothing wrong," said I, cutting him short; and I walked to the companion and descended the steps, he following close.

There were four berths on the port side and five on the other;

right aft the open space was fitted with a small table and fixed chairs ; and between the rows of berths were two long tables for eating at, divided by the mizzen-mast and a handsome stove. Light was admitted by a couple of skylights, protected by brass wire. I am at some pains to recall, in order to give you, these details, for though they may have no interest, yet they are of value as enabling me to offer you a picture of the fabric in whose heart was enacted much of what I have taken up my pen to relate ; and if you mean to honour me with your attention to the end, my story will be the better served by your thoroughly realizing the image of the *Silver Sea*. There was no drapery and there was no carpet ; these things were to come ; the revolving chairs, too, had been removed ; consequently the cabin had a somewhat naked look ; though a brief glance was sufficient to assure me that Mr. Hornby had spared no expense in such embellishments as veneer, and polish, and beautifully grained wood let in and picked out, can give to marine interiors. I looked into the berths, and found them furnished with a couple of bunks or sleeping shelves apiece, each bunk made to resemble an iron bedstead by arms at the head of it, and containing besides a wire spring mattress. There was a large scuttle in every berth, besides bull's eyes, in the deck overhead, together with plated swinging lamps, chests of drawers, and other conveniences, which made cosy little bedrooms of these compartments.

"Ain't it all perfect?" cried the old shipkeeper. "Was there e'er a lovelier wessel? Now that ye've seen the inside of him d'ye still think there's something wrong? Lard preserve ye! look at them doors—look at the casing on that there rudder-trunk—look at the hobjects of beauty delikitly cut on the covering of this here mizenmast! what's to match him? Why, I'll come below, and I'll sit there," said he, indicating a chair at the extremity of the cabin, "where I can see the whole, and spend an hour in the mere joy and satisfaction of just lookin'—nothing more—just lookin'; ay, and not feel the want of a smoke either, or take notice that it's time to get something to eat."

I stopped this extraordinary shipkeeper by giving him a couple of shillings, and then left the ship, having viewed as much of her as I needed to see. You may suppose I was amply satisfied. Years, indeed, had passed since I was at sea, professionally ; but I had not so completely forgotten what had been beaten and kicked into me during my first and only voyage as a sailor, as not to be able to appreciate all the good points of the *Silver Sea*, and witness in her every possible feature that could be introduced into a vessel meant both to please the eye and to provide speed, comfort, and security.

So on my return I wrote to Mr. Edwards, told him I had inspected the vessel and was delighted with her, and that my visit to the docks had confirmed the resolution previously arrived at to accept his invitation. "I will now ask you," I added, "to let me

know for certain, as early as possible, the day on which the *Silver Sea* sails, that I may be well beforehand with my preparations ; and also kindly inform me where I am to join the vessel."

I received a reply next day. The *Silver Sea* would leave dock on May 30 and tow down to Gravesend, where I could join her if I pleased. For the convenience of the Inglesfields she would call in at Plymouth, where I could embark if I chose. For his (Mr. Edwards's) part, he had not yet decided whether to start from that town or Gravesend ; most probably he would join the ship at Plymouth.

So here now was the matter settled ; in the space of a few hours, so to speak, I had been offered and had accepted an invitation to go to the Cape of Good Hope ; to undertake, in short, a voyage that might last five or six months. When I look back I sometimes wonder that it did not take me longer to make up my mind. Mr. Edwards and his friends had had plenty of time to consider, and two of them, at all events, were going for their health's sake, an item in their programme that would outweigh a good deal. But I had accepted from no reason whatever that I know of. Miss Edwards's portrait influenced me to a certain extent, but though it was very pleasant to think of a handsome girl making one of the party, the thought was by no means one I could point to and declare, "That was my motive for going." I liked a short spell of life at sea—a week or two, say—well enough ; but certainly I was not so enamoured of old ocean as to dream of finding much pleasure several months of tossing and tumbling aboard a sailing ship at the caprice of the wind. The truth is, there must have been a sort of grim fatality steering me, and neutralizing all reflections likely to hold me back. Otherwise, why did I embark on this disastrous voyage, seeing that I was perfectly well, in command of a comfortable income that brought all the pleasures I cared for within reach, and that in my youth I had been forced to swallow such a draught of salt water as made me wishful for more of the same fluid in but very small mouthfuls at a time, and at long intervals ?

CHAPTER III.

PLYMOUTH SOUND.

I MET Mr. Edwards several times before the date fixed for sailing ; and finding that he had made up his mind to join the *Silver Sea* at Plymouth, I resolved to embark at that port also. She would be there by June 3rd or 4th, Mr. Edwards said ; and if the weather was favourable she would sail on the day after her arrival, possibly early in the forenoon.

Having made all necessary arrangements for an absence that, I

thought, might quite possibly extend to six months, I proceeded to Plymouth on the day the ship was due there, and drove on my arrival to the Royal Hotel, armed with nothing more than a small portmanteau, as I had taken the precaution to send my baggage to the ship when in dock. It was after seven o'clock, and as there would still be half an hour of daylight left, I made my way to the Hoe, to ascertain if the *Silver Sea* were in the Sound.

Those who have visited Plymouth will not require to be told that the Hoe is an elevation or natural terrace, from whose summit there may be viewed the whole expanse of water that is framed with coast right and left as far as Penlee Point and the Reny Rocks. I was never in that town before, and consequently the lovely scene that opened away from under my feet, to the dim reddish line of the Channel sea past the great breakwater, impressed me like a revelation. The sun was behind Mount Edgcumbe; his crimson light was upon the sky that seemed saturated with moisture, and whose evening blue, therefore, more especially in the east over Cattewater, and the dark green plains beyond, was of an exquisite tenderness. Against the scarlet and gold in the west, the fibrine summits of the tree-clad Mount Edgcumbe trembled, and the heights for half a mile along their peaks looked to be a length of orange and crimson sparklings, whilst the vegetation sloping to the base, formed here and there of coffee-coloured soil or rock, gloomed as it fell, till night itself lurked in the deep shadows along the foot of the land. Right in front of me the noble breakwater lay like a stretch of marble upon the gilded blue of the water. Penlee Point stood up massive against a sky whose tints were of the right kind to give a peculiar largeness and richness to the loom of the tall and lovely coast. Night had already come down upon Cawsand Bay, but little Drake's Island, close at my feet, caught the airy reddish brightness flowing over the trees down the Mount Edgcumbe slope, and streaming up out of the coil of water trending towards Hamoaze, and the dainty rock hovered in the swimming radiance like a piece of filigree work, or rather like a fairy creation, whose life would last no longer than the sunset.

I stood looking for some minutes, forgetting what I had come to seek in the delight the beautiful picture excited in me. There were some little men-of-war brigs near Drake's Island; they resembled the merest toys as they slept at the moorings, yet I thought that from the fine and finishing touches they gave to this evening scene, and for the fragile grace they contained within themselves, they had never yet their equals in marine fabrics. My glance went from them to Mount Batten, at whose foot was the quicksilver of Cattewater, with the hectic of the western light floating over it like an impalpable rose-coloured veil, and I could see as far as Staddon Point, and a glimpse beyond of the Shagstone. The summits of Dunstone and Staddon heights were fast losing the westering

radiance, and you saw them melting into green and brown, and deepening these hues as you watched, whilst over them a bright star was shining. In Jennycliff Bay were four vessels. One was a large steamer, the others full-rigged ships, one of them small in comparison with the rest. The lingering of daylight, fast waning, and already grey on the air betwixt the breakwater and the Hoe, enabled me to witness in the smallest of the ships the green sides, clipper model, and handsomely stayed spars of the *Silver Sea*. There she lay, sure enough, the closest in of them all; and as I described her the light at the entrance of Cattewater Harbour sprang up this side of her, winking at regular intervals, whilst beyond her sparkled the lantern at the extremity of the breakwater.

But I had ordered dinner at eight; and being satisfied that the *Silver Sea* had arrived at Plymouth, I made my way to the hotel. On arriving I inquired if Mr. and Miss Edwards were stopping in the house, and was answered no. The coffee-room was empty, and I ate my dinner in solitude. A man is never duller than in an English hotel in a town strange to him, and in a room furnished with no livelier literature than railway guides and newspapers a week or two old; and thinking despairfully of the lonely hours which lay between me and bedtime, I sent for the boots, and despatched him to the principal hotels in Plymouth, to ascertain if the Edwards's were in the place. I knew they were to join the ship here, and was sure the old gentleman would be glad to see me; and, between ourselves, I was a little impatient to meet the original of the charming portrait that hung in the house in Harley Street.

However, the wretched boots returned and informed me there was nobody named Edwards stopping at any of the houses he had called at; which turned out to be true enough at the hour I despatched him, though had I delayed his errand a little while he would have found them at the Duke of Cornwall Hotel, where they were landed by a train that reached Plymouth shortly before nine.

The boots' failure caused me to suppose that Mr. Edwards had changed his mind, and embarked at Gravesend; so lighting a cigar, I marched up to the Hoe again.

Somehow I could not help feeling more like a passenger forced to leave his home, and spending his last night in old England, than as one of a party about to start on a jolly holiday jaunt, in a stout and clipper ship, in search of what delights the ocean has to yield. Anyway, there was a kind of reluctance in me which I was perfectly sensible of, though I don't know that I could have put it into words. It might have been bred by the sight of the ships glooming like phantoms down in the vague bay, each one with a little spark glittering on its stay or mast, and by the shadowy land stretching out on either side, like huge visionary arms seeking to enfold

the expanse of star-tipped surface, and by the darkness of the distant sea, in the sky, over the breakwater. There was a band of music playing, I could not tell where ; the sounds floated up from the direction of Stonehouse, and the stirring of the night wind, blowing softly in a kind of breathings, brought the tones along in risings and fallings. There were people walking on the promenade—dim figures of sweethearts with hands linked, husbands and wives one in advance of the other in true matrimonial style, and here and there a man looking quietly out to sea, as if impressed by the beauty of the dark night and the silence in it.

But I had sauntered down one of the many paths which lead to the road and the rocks, and had come to a halt below the brow of the grassy slope, and here I was as much alone as if I had been Tom Campbell's last man. The water was lip-lipping on the beach beneath me, and was as full of music as a peal of glass bells heard from afar. There was no moon ; but there were stars of the first magnitude, which dropped clearly cut wakes of icy radiance in the dark water, and now and again I would watch the passage of a little hurry of air break the tiny shafts into a hundred fragments of silver. The bland magic of moonlight was wanting, but there was something very impressive in the deep shadow that lay upon the Sound, and that the stars defined without penetrating.

I glanced in the direction of the *Silver Sea*, and observed a wan outline, scarce discoverable but for her riding-light, and then only to be seen by looking a little away from her. What a phantom to compass the two Atlantics in ! how was that dim smudge there going to contain the large responsibilities of our lives, and convey us to the southernmost point of Africa and back again ? Fanciful as such thoughts were, they would have occurred, I do believe, to the most matter-of-fact mind that had looked into that great shadow as I did, from under the brow of the Plymouth Hoe, and fixed with difficulty the elusive blotch that denoted the fabric of our sea home. In daylight you can see your ship, observe the people on board her, and measure her dimensions by their standard ; she is a solid, substantial shape. But at night she almost dies out ; she is little more than imagination ; what you perceive of her is only just enough to emphasize the sense of unreality she conveys ; she is a day-created bubble, pricked by the hag Darkness, and in this way is so great a mockery, that her reappearance at dawn scarcely falls short of a miracle. To look at the phantasm of the *Silver Sea* in the deep shadow that lay upon Jennycliff Bay was to feel somewhat as if one should trust one's life to explore the ocean in an object made out of the stuff from which dreams are manufactured.

But the gleam of the distant Eddystone had for some hours now *been shining* beyond the breakwater's light ; again and again had *the chimes of clocks* in the three towns floated out of the hum of

life in the streets, and found silvery reverberations in the bells of the ships in the Sound ; the Hoe was almost deserted, and over the whole picture of gloom, and bright stars, and points of yellow light, and over the shadow of the shores, and the scarcely determinable shapes of ships between, the hush of slumber rested, giving a deeper quietude to the darkness.

In short, it was time to quit the grass and the dew, and go to bed ; so forthwith I walked to the hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

I EMBARK.

I WAS up betimes next morning, and at half-past ten o'clock was seated in a boat and making for the *Silver Sea*. The day had fulfilled the promise of the night ; a soft southerly wind was blowing, the sky was an azure dome, with here and there a fragment of cloud like the new moon floating along and melting upon it ; and Plymouth Sound under the sun was a surface of broken, rippling, trembling silver.

"As pretty a little ship as ever I saw," says the boatman, looking over his shoulder ; "where might she be bound, sir ?"

"To the Cape of Good Hope," said I.

"Well, an' she'll get there," he exclaimed. "Never saw a likelier craft. Cast you eye from her to that steam tank ; isn't it enough to make a man think that the art of shipbuilding's dead an' gone ?"

He indicated the lumping steamer that lay among the sailing ships. She was not an Englishman, though I really forget the nationality of the colour she flew at the peak. She was a huge metal cistern, and nothing more nor less ; a straight bow, rendered hideous by immense hawse-pipes, her sides painted a kind of grey, with a row of little scuttles which made her look like a floating prison, and so ludicrously under-sparred that the royal masthead of the *Silver Sea* towered high above the main truck of this three thousand ton steamship.

It was not without complacency that I obeyed my waterman's recommendation to contrast the two vessels. The glorious, searching, sparkling sunlight made our ship real enough now. The dim blotch of the previous night was transformed into a noble, glittering, elegant little vessel ; the brown and green of the heights betwixt Dunstone and Ram's Cliff Point were behind her ; and against them she stood out like a cameo, her green and glossy sides tremulous with the sparkles in the water, her furled white canvas lying like a

recent snowfall upon her black yards, a large brand-new red ensign pulling in rich colour at the halliards at the peak, and blue Peter lazily fluttering above the fore-royal yard. She was in fine trim, I thought, though I will not pretend that I brought much of a nautical eye to bear upon her. The line of her yellow metal was above water, and she sat like a swan proudly lifting the delicate structure of her spars and rigging, with a slight rise forward that seemed to anticipate the swells and hollows of the stormy ocean.

The boatman put me alongside, and catching up my portmanteau, I mounted the gangway ladder and stepped on to the ship's deck. Near the wheel was a very little grey-whiskered man talking to a broad-shouldered fellow of medium height, dressed in a blue cloth all-round coat, from under which his legs stood out in arches which made as fair an oval of the daylight between them as ever I saw betwixt the human knees. There were some seamen forward, but nobody in the gangway, and, consequently, I marched aft to the companion, under which I supposed I should find the steward.

On seeing me the little man left his bow-legged friend, and advanced towards me with a sort of bowing motion, and peering up into my face he said, "Are you Mr. Aubyn?"

I replied, "Yes."

"I am Mr. Hornby," said he. "Very glad to see you, sir. Very happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Aubyn," putting out his hand and shaking mine heartily. "Steward!" he shouted, running rapidly to the companion and putting his head into it, "come and take Mr. Aubyn's portmanteau below. Number two cabin, you know;" and then he came briskly back to me. "Beautiful weather, eh? Most propitious for the start, don't you know, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes, indeed," I replied. "Is Mr. Edwards on board?"

"No, you are the first of the guests to join us here. I came down in the ship from Gravesend. Captain Pipes!" he called out to the bow-legged man, who stood diffidently in the place where Mr. Hornby had left him; and when the skipper approached the little man introduced us: Mr. Aubyn—Captain Moses Pipes, in command of the *Silver Sea*, you know."

"Glad to meet you, sir," exclaimed Captain Pipes, fingering the long peak of his cap that jutted out from his forehead like a carpenter's stage from the side of a ship; and he gave me an immense leathery hand, which I shook very cordially.

He was—to the eye—as queer and also as complete a sea-dog as you could imagine. I know not whether it was strong breezes and many of them that had warped his face out of all similitude to the ordinary and familiar cut of the facial outline; but, whatever the cause might be, I observed that Captain Pipes' countenance spread out from the rather sharp chin to a line with either eyebrow, at an angle of about twenty degrees, whence it shelved rapidly off into

his hair, that was very thick and grizzly, and of a solid and shining substance that murmured "grease." The horizontal expansion of his face gave a very wide spread to his eyes, which were of a dark and greenish hue, like drops of sea water imprisoned in a perfect net of red steaks. Sensible, perhaps, of the improper width of his face, he had cultivated as much whisker as nature would suffer the storm-hardened texture of his skin to produce; and there hung, on either side his jaws, a kind of furzy knob that did undoubtedly subdue the remarkable angularity I have mentioned. His complexion was a spotty brown, and quite a little bush of hair flourished on the top of his nose. Several devices in India ink embellished the backs of his hands, and you could see the blue lines of flags, bracelets, and rings, not to mention anchors and fish, winding snake-like among the fur that made paws of his massive fists. He was dressed in a good suit of blue cloth, an unstarched printed shirt and stiff white stand-up collar, which lay well open to receive his face, that fitted into them as a ball does in a cup. But queer, and salt, and hide-like as that face was, there was a world of good-humour, frankness, sailor's heartiness, and simplicity of mind in it.

"You have charge of a very pretty ship, Captain Pipes," said I.

"Ay," he replied, running his eye along the decks, "pretty's the word, sir, as you truly observe. I never saw anything handsomer in her way, though I've lived to witness many changes, steadily going from bad to worse."

"Are you fond of the sea? do you like the idea of this voyage, Mr. Aubyn?" exclaimed little Mr. Hornby, in whose manner there was a kind of hopping and bird-like character, a sort of pecking and bill-sharpening briskness. His nose, indeed, had somewhat the look of a bird's beak, his eyes were round, small, and bright, and his manner of rubbing and washing his hands when he spoke, and his looking up into your face with his head on one side, and the contraction of his mouth into a pursed-up, whistling appearance, as though he strained on his heels without actually getting on his toes, made me then and ever after think of him as a complete tom-tit of a man.

"Oh, very much indeed," I replied. "At what hour do you sail?"

"As soon as we've embarked our passengers," answered Captain Pipes, rolling his glance round the sky.

"London makes a man feel very stale," exclaimed Mr. Hornby, jerking his little hand on to my arm, and as jerkily removing it. "I was beginning to feel quite used up, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. I have no doubt whatever that fog gets into the blood. The smuts penetrate the veins, and that accounts for the grimy complexions you meet between Temple Bar and the Mansion House. When my friend Edwards informed me of his intention to seek a cure for his gout on the ocean he quite inspired me.

You know what I mean, don't you? I felt that three or four months upon the water would be the best remedy in the world for my staleness, and so," said he, grinning up at me with his bright eyes, and rubbing his hands and striking his feet one against the other sideways alternately, in his incapacity to stand still, "I placed my children—twins, nine years old, Mr. Aubyn—in charge of an aunt, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, and here I am, a mariner, a rollicking free and easy yeo-heave-ho son of a swab, eh, Captain Pipes? with dull Care miles out of sight already away beyond the hills yonder;" and he pointed his little arm towards the land.

Pipes was smiling broadly.

"There's one good job, Mr. Aubyn," said he; "dull Care, as Mr. Hornby rightly calls him, can't swim a stroke. He'll go with you fast enough if you choose to let him come aboard; but if you refuse admittance to him, he's done. Well, yes, it's true he can go round to the port you're bound to, and wait for you there. But on the blue water, unless he's aboard, there's nothing to fear from him. That must be our condition, gentlemen. We must take care to sail without him."

All this, in calm defiance of the truth—for who should know better than a sea captain that nowhere is dull Care more likely to be found than on blue water, where every gale gives him wings, and every rock standing room, and every hollow sea a shelter?—Captain Pipes delivered with his broad and inimitable smile: and broad his smile was; not from ear to ear, but from 'ere to there, as Colonel Inglesfield once said to me at the top of his voice, and his arms wide apart.

"We will, Pipes; never fear, skipper," cried Mr. Hornby. "Have you seen your cabin, Mr. Aubyn? would you like to view the ship?"

I told him that I had inspected the vessel when in dock, but the cabin and berths were then unfurnished.

"Then pray step below," said he, "and let me have your opinion of my taste."

Down we went, he leading the way. I found the cabin greatly improved. The sunshine streamed on the skylights, and sparkled through openings in the red curtains, and flowed in little pools of gold upon the polished wood. There was a thick handsome carpet on the floor, some fixed and comfortable armchairs right aft where the little table stood, flowers and ferns on shelves, a piano, a large collection of books in a case, and other matters in that way; so that, what with plated swinging trays and lamps, mirrors, racks full of table glass, velvet-covered sofas, and flowers, not to mention the builder's ornamentation of the interior as I have already described *it*, the cabin was an extremely elegant saloon, offering plenty of *space*, and as *airy and full of light* as any drawing-room ashore.

I warmly congratulated Mr. Hornby on the taste he had exhibited and the little man bowed and skipped about with a beaming face, and seemed much gratified by my applause. He showed me the pantry, that was the last of the compartments aft on the starboard side, and next door to mine, and obliged me to take a look at the other berths ; from which I gathered the following disposition of our party :—first, as I have said, my berth was number two, next the pantry ; number three belonged to Colonel and Mrs. Inglefield ; numbers four and five to the second and third mates respectively ; number six facing the pantry, to Mr. Valentine Edwards ; number seven was to be shared by Miss Edwards and Miss Inglefield ; number eight was Mr. Wellesley Hornby's, and number nine Captain Moses Pipes's.

Thus all the first-class cabin accommodation was occupied, though there was room enough in the steerage and 'tween decks for ten times the number of our party, had Mr. Edwards found friends willing to fill the vessel.

"Have you a good ship's company, Mr. Hornby?" I asked.

"I can answer for the master and mates," he replied briskly. "The choosing of a crew is usually left to the skipper, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. Pipes is pretty certain to have selected wisely. He's a rough one to look at, Mr. Aubyn ; but as Dr. Goldsmith said of Dr. Johnson, he has nothing of the bear but the skin. A most happy image, don't you think?"

"Most happy," said I. "Shall we go on deck and see if our friends are in sight?"

He hopped up the companion ladder with amazing agility—he was certainly not far off sixty : I followed, and we stepped into the glorious sunshine and the warm salt breeze blowing fair into the Sound out of the blue Channel. My first glance swept the water from Milbay Pier to Fisher's Nose in search of a boat containing anybody resembling the people we were waiting for.

"You'll find that the Edwardses are detained by Mrs. Inglefield," said Mr. Hornby, offering me his cigar-case and then lighting a large cigar that threw him ludicrously out of proportion. "I have the pleasure of knowing that lady. A very charming woman, but a trifle—well, vain, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. In short, fond of dress. The want of a hair-pin would be quite enough for her to detain the ship twenty-four hours. It would indeed, I assure you."

However, I, for one, was in no hurry ; and had the *Silver Sea* lingered a week in the Sound I should have been content. The freshness and glory of that morning are not to be expressed. Under the sun every wrinkle in the water rolled in flashing silver ; Mount Edgcumbe and Redding Point had the gloss of the vernal year on their green livery, and they resembled a vast surge rolling over in folds of rich vegetation, with spaces of shining sward

between, and brown rock melting into the water. Past them was the fine sweep of Cawsand Bay, its little village nestling low down. There were yachts and smacks in the offing and close in. The big steamer had received her freight of emigrants, and was slowly steaming out as I came on deck, her forecastle and bulwark rails dark with heads; and just beyond her were two of the little man-of-war brigs under way, with their single topsails and topgallant-sails and royals gleaming like white silk. A portion of the water that rounds into Hamoaze was visible, and full in the frame of Mount Edgcumbe and Devil's Point lay an old line-of-battle ship, with her chequered sides mirrored in the sheltered tide, and a gallant show of signals enriching the blue sky with their spots of colour. The sound of life in the town behind the green bulwark of the Hoe and the greyish walls of the Citadel came along mellow against the blue and brilliant breeze, with now and again the sound of a bugle or the wailing of bagpipes.

It put the blood of a boy into one's veins to breathe and look around. The glittering dance came off the water into my heart, and life was stirred to her innermost sources by the spirit of the flashing June day, the loveliness of the tall green and brown coasts, and the wonderful vitality imparted to the whole by the motion of the scores of little vessels and boats, and the ceaseless running of the burnished ripples under the soaring sun.

This Plymouth Sound is a noble expanse indeed. I have visited it since that time, and could tell of many a spot breaking upon the eye like a poem upon the ear, to be found up Cattedwater, whose quicksilver is spanned by the Laira bridge that frames the dark blue of the distant Dartmoor hills. Many a gem glorifies the skirts of the rich mantle that attires our fair mother Britannia; but I know of none purer and fairer than this or her Devonshire coast—this space of water that is flanked by a swelling coast from Cremill to Rame Head, and from Batten Point to where the range of shore dies out in the Mewstone Rocks.

Our own and the other ships' bells were striking the hour of noon, when little Mr. Hornby came running up to me, pointing and crying, "There they are, Mr. Aubyn!" and looking, I spied a couple of boats approaching us, one in the wake of the other. The first contained Mr. Edwards and, as I might suppose, his daughter; the other the Inglefields, who were bringing their baggage with them, a great array of boxes and small packages that sunk the boat well by the head, and that might have made you suppose the owners were going out to colonize an island.

"Now you can understand why they're behindhand," said Mr. Hornby, as he and Captain Pipes and I went to the gangway to receive them. "Feathers require careful packing, and if Mrs. Inglefield took it into her head that a box, a piece of ribbon, a powder-puff, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, was missing, she'd open every box to look for it and make sure."

As the first boat drew near, Mr. Edwards waved his hand to us and called out, "How are you, Hornby?—how are you, Aubyn? Will you tell the captain I shall want help to climb that ladder?"

"Would you like a chair, sir?" sung out Captain Pipes. "We'll have you up in a trice with a yard-arm whip."

"No, no," answered the old fellow. "Never mind about a chair. Send me a good arm to lean upon—that'll do."

On this I jumped on to the ladder and went down it to receive my friend. The boat came alongside, and was immediately followed by the other.

"You'd better get out first, Margaret," exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "Aubyn, let me introduce you to my daughter."

I raised my hat and extended my hand to her; she took it, leaped lightly on the steps, and went up past me to little Hornby, who stood close behind. I leaned forward with my elbow projected for Mr. Edwards to grasp.

"Steady, sir!" cried the boatman.

"Oh!" groaned my rheumatic friend, as his erect posture stretched his muscles and joints for him.

"Take plenty of time," said I. "Catch hold of my arm; so!—Boatman, shore the gentleman up behind—don't *shove* him yet, you fool! Now put your foot on the gunwale, Mr. Edwards; that's right;" and supported by the boatman and pulled by me, he got on to the ladder and slowly mounted it, cursing the gout at every step, and only pausing in these sallies to burst into a laugh.

I helped him through the gangway, and then some of the crew went down the ladder to hand the Inglefields up and send their luggage aboard.

"I dare say you thought we were never coming, Hornby," said Mr. Edwards, limping to a camp-stool near the foremost skylight, and sitting down. "It was the Inglefields' fault: they have brought about nine hundred and ninety-nine boxes and parcels along with them."

"Just what I suggested to Mr. Aubyn," exclaimed Mr. Hornby, grinning, and washing his hands. "Oh, Miss Edwards, how fond you ladies are of luggage, to be sure!"

She was standing at her father's side, running her eyes over the ship and away to the green coast, and I stole peep after peep at her whilst the Inglefields came on board, and the colonel on the steps was shouting to the sailors to mind what they were about with his boxes.

Assuredly Wilkins Montebello, Esq., R.A., was no flatterer. The portrait was as faithful as a portrait can be, which is merely saying that the art of the painter had transfixed one of a thousand beauties, and skewered it lifeless, though like, upon a piece of canvas. And yet, confound him! he did the original justice quit outside the reach of my pen. If paint can do little for a woman

have been what Pat would call "a shtroke" of coloured blood in him ; and a large white moustache, rolled up at the corners, caused his face to resemble a small mattress of hair with a man behind it, trying to get out in order to breathe.

"How are you, Edwards, again? Manage to get on board all right?" he shouted. "You'll excuse me for looking after my luggage. If one of those trunks had slipped it would have burst open, and that would have been confoundedly unpleasant, Hornby. By the way, Hornby, how d'ye do?" Then turning to me, "This is Mr.—?"

"Aubyn," said his wife.

"I hope you are well, sir?" he roared, grasping my hand. And then looking at the skipper, "And this?"

"Captain Pipes," said his wife.

"Ha! the most important man in the ship. Our pilot, our navigator, the gallant seaman who is to waft us truly over the ocean's breast—no! I don't mean waft, I should have said steer. Happy to shake hands with you, Captain Pipes," he shouted, whilst the poor skipper, who seemed to feel these noisy compliments acutely, blushed and bowed, the daylight meanwhile between his legs visibly widening, and his eye seeking first one and then another of our faces, as though anxious to make sure he was not being laughed at.

"There's nothing to detain us now, I think?" said Hornby fluttering among us.

"Nothing that I know of," said Mr. Edwards, who sat on the camp-stool with one rheumatic limb stuck straight out like a wooden leg.

"Is it calm outside?" asked Mrs. Inglefield.

"A pond, ma'am," responded Pipes. "Pity there's not more wind." And he crossed over to the chief mate, not displeased, I thought, to get clear of us.

The last of the Inglefields' boxes having been passed below, the colonel, his wife and daughter, followed to look after their traps. I then gave Mr. Edwards a hand to his cabin, and a mighty load he was on my arm. He favoured me with the full weight of his immense figure, and showed me his wrists and knuckles as he limped. His daughter took charge of him when I had helped him down the companion steps, and I then turned into my own berth.

CHAPTER V.

THE WINDLASS IS MANNED.

I LINGERED awhile overhauling my clothes, putting them away, and making my berth comfortable. After a bit, certain unmistakable

sounds on deck announced preparations for getting the ship under way. Hearing voices in the cabin I looked out, and found the after of the two tables clothed for lunch, and Mr. Edwards and his daughter and Mr. Hornby and Miss Inglefield seated, whilst the steward ran about putting cold fowl and ham and bottles of beer and wine before them.

"Come along, Aubyn," called out Mr. Edwards, in his hearty manner. "Sit ye down, my friend, and fall to. There's no ceremony—there never will be any, but least of all to-day, for we're in a hurry to return on deck and take our farewell of Plymouth, before Pipes puts the headlands between us and it."

I took a chair, and was soon as busy as any of them. The colonel and his wife had breakfasted late, I learnt, and not wanting lunch, were occupying themselves in their berth. (And here let me say that by berth I mean the sleeping-place, and by bunk the bedstead, and by cabin the living room or saloon.) I sat opposite Miss Edwards, and had a good view of her. There were red curtains round the skylights, and the sunshine filtering through them formed a good atmosphere for this girl to be seen in. Our glance met now and then! the fault was mine, for she seldom looked my way without finding me watching her; and I thought that never before in mortal woman had I seen such eyes, so dark, so deep, yet meeting yours with a light in them that was like a gushing of soft fire. Miss Inglefield was pretty, as I have said, and alone might have exerted no uncommon influence upon a sensitive heart; but alongside Margaret Edwards she was very insipid. There was an intrepidity of beauty about this last that made one haul down one's colours at once. First impressions are often deepest, it is said, and I believe they are so; for though, as you will read, I was much thrown with this girl, I recall nothing of her more clearly than her appearance that day at lunch—our first meal on board the *Silver Sea*—when she sat at table in her hat, often speaking with smiles which flung a light upon her face, lifting her dark and luminous eyes to the skylight whenever a louder note than usual on deck rang down into the cabin, and enriching the whole interior with her presence, as a carnation, or a lily, or a spray of clematis will make the atmosphere of a room aromatic.

"Are you likely to be sea-sick, Hornby?" asked Mr. Edwards.

"I'll not brag, for fear," responded the little man. "I'm one of those wise prophets who reserve their predictions until after the event."

"Are you a good sailor, Miss Edwards?" I asked.

"I would rather wait a little before answering that question," she replied.

"Mamma will suffer, I'm afraid," observed Miss Inglefield very quietly; in fact, it was sometimes difficult to catch what she said.

"Oh, it'll do her good," cried Mr. Edwards, who was making a

large lunch. "But the colonel's an old hand; five or six times round the Cape, you must know, Aubyn."

"What a row they're making on deck!" said Hornby. "Why cannot merchant seamen work without singing? They have the hoarsest, most unmusical voices in the world, and they will not lift up the end of a rope without yelling, and yawling, and so-ho-ing. Isn't the flapping of sails distracting enough? What makes sailors hoarse, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

"The beef they're obliged to eat," said I.

"And the worms, Hornby; the bread grubs which you ship-owners give them with their biscuit," exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "Miss Inglefield, I hope we are safe. I know Hornby places a high value on his life, and that's a warrant for the soundness of this ship. But if the crew should get to hear there's a shipowner on board—!"

Little Hornby, twitching and working upon his chair, laughed at the top of his small voice. "Miss Inglefield," he cried, "my being here not only warrants the ship, but the crew also. Jack loves shipowners instinctively. He cannot account for the passion—it is born in him. He comes into the world yearning towards us as a body. Sooner than that a hair on our heads should be injured there are no extremities to which he would not cheerfully be driven. It is a well-known fact that crews who have refused to keep a leaky ship afloat have eagerly returned to their duty on being informed by the captain that the owner has been in the vessel all the while, ill in his cabin, and therefore invisible; and by this stratagem the master has induced them to go on pumping, and all that sort of thing don't you know, till a haven was reached and the ship saved. So magical is the name of shipowner upon sailors."

Here the colonel thrust his head out of his berth and roared, "I say, Edwards, may a man open his bedroom window in June aboard a ship? The atmosphere here's enough to roast old Nick."

"What, do you mean the scuttle—the porthole? by all means open it, colonel," said Hornby.

"Yes," cried Mrs. Inglefield behind her husband, "but if the ship leans down won't the wafer come in? My bed is the top one, if you please, Mr. Hornby."

On being told that there was no fear the colonel closed the door, and soon after we heard him shouting and occasionally bursting out with a sea blessing delivered through his teeth.

"What can be the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Edwards.

"It is evidently papa trying to open the window," said Miss Inglefield.

And so it proved; for in a few moments out whipped the colonel's hairy face, with perspiration streaming down every visible portion of it.

"Hornby," he bawled, "I don't want to say unpleasant things of

your ship, but I wish to heaven that the builder who constructed her could be used as a lever ; I'd like to make a crowbar of him for about an hour. Look how his rascally screw has served my knuckle !”

“ Please, somebody, send the captain to open this window,” cried Mrs. Inglefield ; “ It has nearly broken *all* the colonel's blood-vessels. You know, Mr. Edwards, what a determined man he is ; and though he can't do it, he *will* go on trying.”

On this the steward stepped in, and after a moment or two reappeared, having opened the scuttle very easily. “ The gentleman endeavoured to turn the screw the wrong way, sir,” I heard him mutter in little Hornby's ear.

We did not sit long over lunch ; nevertheless, we found time to effectually break any little ice that might have lingered. The chorusing of seaman on the forecastle, accompanied by the clanking sounds of the revolving windlass barrel, penetrated to the cabin, and was the best hint in the world that we should soon have the sea under our feet. Mr. Hornby was too short a man to be of use as a support to one of Mr. Edwards's stature in climbing the companion ladder, so, as I assisted him below, I offered to help the old gentleman on deck again.

“ You are very good, Aubyn,” said he ; and he offered several apologies, saying it was quite unreasonable that he should convert me into a crutch, and that he hoped in a few days to be able to obtain all the help he would need from his daughter, if, indeed, he should by that time need any help at all. Nevertheless, I am bound to say he seized hold of me with a will, and bore down so heavily on my shoulder as he staggered and grunted, that I came very near to reeling under his weight. On emerging through the hatch and pausing there a moment he said, “ Don't let the colonel's noise prejudice you against him. He means nothing by it. He can't help shouting, his temper is quick, and he'll wrangle with a window he can't open, or a key he can't instantly turn in a lock, as if it were a human being and could understand him.”

I laughed. “ Indian officers—I take him to be one—are often peppery. Roasting suns, and fiery curry, and big livers, and the automatic obedience of the black man—eh ? I wonder they come home with any temper left.”

“ Inglefield is an excellent fellow,” said Mr. Edwards.

“ I am sure of that,” I replied, helping him to his camp-stool.

This thin slice of apology induced me to suppose that had more of Mr. Edwards's friends been willing to join his party, the Inglefields would not have been included. Possibly under those circumstances I, too, might have shared their fate of omission. Of your wide circle of acquaintance you would not, I dare say, find *very many* disposed to make a voyage with you in a sailing ship to the Cape of Good Hope and back. If a man will have

guests, then, whether for a ball or a cruise, he must be satisfied with the best he can get.

Miss Inglefield seated herself on the edge of the skylight alongside Mr. Edwards. Hornby and Miss Edwards stood talking near the mizzen-rigging. For the moment I was content to look on and around me. Whilst we were at lunch a tug had arrived to tow us out. This was rendered necessary by such wind as there was blowing dead into the Sound. Captain Moses Pipes upon his hoop-like legs rolled up and down the quarterdeck; forward the crew were plying the windlass, bringing the chain in handsomely to the chorus that followed a hoarse and gasping solo at regular intervals. Mr. Alan Bird, the mate, a sailorly, sunburnt, red-bearded man, a good specimen of the British merchant sailor, stood between the knightheads, encouraging the men to heave and raise the dead; and the second mate, Mr. Nicholas Semple, a rough, ungainly, but hearty north countryman, with wild hair and whiskers as though he had just descended the rigging after encountering a gale of wind aloft, stood in the waist in attendance upon the master. It was a gay scene, full of colour and spirit. The clocks ashore had struck two, and the glory of the high sun stood like a dazzling mirror, that defied more than an instant's glance, between the eastern end of the breakwater and Bovisand Bay. A large three-masted ironclad, with low squab funnel, massive rigging, and ebony lustreless hull, which the water returned in a reflection like the shadow of a thunder-cloud, was cautiously feeling her way past Drake's Island, and in every direction the sparkling crisping Sound was alive with boats, smacks, yachts, and steamers. A group of black figures on the breakwater from time to time fired a piece of artillery, the explosion of which seemed, like the ball it sent flying, to ricochet over the green heights and along the distant land in fainting sounds. There was a constant noise of firing, too, in the direction of the river Tamar, and from Cattewater the detonations of the rock-blasters swung sulkily athwart the wind.

The sunshine, the freshness, the beauty of the picture, the steamers full of holiday-making people, the homely smacks, the gleaming yachts, the little boats with their tranquil figure or two hanging over the side fishing, the glimpse of nestling English life you caught in the village of Cawsand away in the bight of the silken bay of that name, the shining verdant Hoe, with its houses on top and its flanking of the citadel's grey walls, the early June loveliness of the vegetation, the hundred tints and graces of the swelling and sweeping shores, made the scene one to put pathos into any sort of farewell that was to be taken of it. I can answer for myself that this English picture, *felt*, so to speak, through the *rough chousing* of the crew getting the anchor, and the clanking *sounds of the chain grinding* in through the hawse-pipe, subdued

my feelings to a temper almost of regret, and certainly of melancholy.

To spare myself a passage of sentiment that certainly would have been entirely out of place, and but a poor compliment to my hospitable host, I crossed over to Miss Edwards and Mr. Hornby. I could not have done a wiser thing. The moment I met the girl's dark and liquid eyes my pensiveness dropped from me like a caterpillar from a shaken plant. Nay, that my poetical expression may rise to the occasion, it was like the glittering of a sunbeam following the dawn, shining on a dark cloud, and making it festive with an apparel of rich tints.

"A very interesting scene, Mr. Aubyn," exclaimed Hornby, chafing his hands and briskly revolving to gaze around him. "Full of marine interest, eh? quite worthy of a painter's canvas, and all that sort of thing, don't you know."

"That's a high compliment to Plymouth Sound," said Miss Edwards, smiling with an arch look from the little fellow to me.

Her mantling beauty—excuse the image; I want to convey my sense of the suffusion of soft colour, of bright spirit, of physical and intellectual warmth, that seemed to flush her face afresh whenever she looked at you, though they were always there—and her inscrutable gipsy eyes positively made me feel timid. If I had thought her figure commanding, you may guess how it impressed me now, contrasted as it was by little Hornby's. I have laughed at writers calling their heroines goddesses, queens, houris, and the like; but I despise that sort of imagery no longer. Your imagination can do little for another's in expressing beauty, bearing, manners, and so forth without similitudes; and though, speaking of women, I don't believe that one must necessarily love the highest when one sees it—since I have beheld some adorable creatures who were very much indeed below the highest in the strict poetical sense—yet when one comes to describe the highest—to deal, in short, with such a girl as Margaret Edwards, why, what is one to say? how is one to make one's emotion intelligible and affect that of others, if it is forbidden to go to the ancient poets, or refer to thrones, or even reverently to turn the eyes up to heaven for an example of beauty—call it queen, angel, or goddess—to whom to liken her?

Rendered timid, as I have said, by her beauty, I observed nervously, and with a face that I felt wore a bashful look, that we should soon be at sea now, and sailing for the other side of the world.

"The Cape of Good Hope sounds a long way off," she exclaimed, with a yearning look towards Plymouth town.

"Nothing, I assure you, Miss Edwards," cried Hornby. "Just a handful of miles, in a manner of speaking. When once you have crossed the equator and run out of the south-east trades, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, why, there you are."

"I hope it will do papa good," said she.

"I have no doubt it will," I exclaimed.

"This is not your first voyage—your first long voyage, I believe, Mr. Aubyn?"

"No," I replied; and I told her that when a lad I had six months of it in a cruel West India brig.

"Terribly hard life, the sea," remarked Mr. Hornby, straining on his little legs like a flitting bird. "As a youth I was nearly going to it, but changed my mind when I reflected on the whole that it is better to hire sailors than be one. By the way, I hope, Miss Edwards, you ladies will be able to manage without a stewardess, and all that sort of thing? If you feel the want, don't hold *me* responsible. There's the culprit," pointing to Mr. Edwards.

"Yes, I know. I have no doubt we shall manage very well. Still, I think papa might have allowed us a stewardess, since Mrs. Inglefield and I consented to leave our maids behind."

"He wants the cruise to be a sort of homely sea picnic," said I, gaining more self-confidence as I noticed how unconventional and genuine this charming woman was. "He would not have a doctor, he told me, his object in leaving England being to seek for himself what his physicians cannot apparently find for him."

"He's right there!" exclaimed Hornby, giving a perfect shower of nods. "A doctor would have to justify his existence on board, and if we didn't fall ill he'd make us so."

"We ladies must help one another—only," said Miss Edwards, with her fine smile, "if we should all three be sea-sick, who will attend to us till one is sufficiently recovered to wait upon the others?"

"The colonel can look after his wife and daughter," responded Mr. Hornby; "whilst as to *you*, Miss Edwards—" and the pleasant little creature put his hand to his heart and bowed with his eyes half closed.

I caught a glance from the girl, and laughed outright, and to cover my mirth said, "Is there no fear of your being sea-sick too, Mr. Hornby?"

"I should hope," he gravely replied, "that the obligation of attending upon Miss Edwards would check all possibility of nausea. Who, having such a duty to discharge, could be sea-sick, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

Miss Margaret's face was full of merriment, though she thanked him without a smile for his promised attention. How she could keep her countenance when she looked down on him I cannot imagine. He was a mere boy in size, and this and his grey hair and old face, and his sparrow-like restlessness, made him a person *very provocative* of kindly mirth.

"*Not at sea yet! not even under way?*" roared a voice behind

us; and turning we beheld the colonel accompanied by his wife. "Why, Edwards, I expected to find the ship leagues out of sight of land, upon the open and azure main!"

Chairs were brought, and we stood or sat in a group near Mr. Edwards, out of the way of the men when they should come tumbling aft to make sail or haul upon the ropes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE "SILVER SEA" SAILS.

By this time the cable was in the situation that is termed "hove short;" the anchor was still on the ground, but the chain was "up and down" with it, and only a few turns of the windlass barrel were now needed to liberate the ship. The hearty chorus of the seamen ceased on a sudden, some loud orders delivered by Captain Pipes were re-echoed on the forecastle, and I saw the tug manœuvring under the ship's bows as a line was thrown to her, and her people dragged our hawser on to her deck. Of our crew I could as yet form no opinion; the whole of them were forward, including the "idlers" (the steward excepted), and they looked a tolerably likely set of fellows—some of them of an unmistakably Dutch or Scandinavian type of countenance, and dressed in the various rigs worn by merchant seamen.

"I suppose we're off in a minute now?" cried out Colonel Inglefield.

"Only waiting for the tug to secure the end of our hawser," replied Mr. Hornby, "and then up comes the anchor, and 'Hurrah for the sea, the sea, the open sea,' and all that sort of thing, don't you know!"

"I hope those men will stop shooting off that gun until we are out of reach," exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield, directing a hand that flashed with rings towards the breakwater: "were a ball to hit us, it would make a hole, and down we should sink."

"I wish they *would* hit us!" called out the colonel. "Nothing would please me better than to bring an action against the Admiralty. The naval wick wants snuffing now and again, I can tell you."

"Those fellows look like soldiers," said I.

"Then," shouted the colonel, "I'd bring an action against the military commander-in-chief. Somebody should be responsible for shooting us, by Heaven! What right, I say, what *right* have the military or naval authorities of this port to allow men to collect on *that breakwater*, and discharge shotted guns in the direction of

passing ships? Why the thing's monstrous! Imagine a ball killing me! Is Mrs. Inglefield to have no claim upon anybody?—eh?—eh?—don't you see my argument?—why—”

“They'll not hurt us, colonel,” said Mr. Edwards, laughing, while the choleric officer pulled off his hat and mopped his forehead. “Aubyn, what's the name of the lower of those two poles across the mast there?”

“The lower maintopsail yard,” I replied.

“What fanciful names sailors have given to their ship's masts and rigging!” observed Miss Edwards.

“Most deplorable jargon, I think,” said Mrs. Inglefield. “How different from military terms!”

“No, no, anything but *jargon*!” exclaimed Miss Edwards. “The few terms I know are wonderfully expressive; and see what our every-day language owes to sailors!”

“We shall be under way in a minute,” piped little Hornby, swinging his legs on the chair that was too tall to enable his feet to touch the deck. As he spoke, the windlass pawls clanked afresh, and a hurricane chorus came rattling past our ears.

“In proof of the justice of Miss Edwards's remark, Mrs. Inglefield,” said I, “let me tell you that no lover could have equipped his sweetheart more lavishly than Jack has his ship. Observe how he has decorated her: he has given her chains, jewel-blocks and bangles, garnets, breast-hooks and ribbands, gauntlets, and heels, hoods, garlands and collars, not to mention horses and hounds, and a score of other things.”

“And cradles,” said Hornby.

“Yes,” said I, “and gammoning.”

“You're joking!” exclaimed Mr. Edwards.

“The skipper shall prove my veracity when he has leisure,” I replied.

“Anchor's away, sir!” roared Mr. Bird, the first mate, from the forecastle.

Pipes flourished his hand, the hawser tautened, and in a moment the jibboom of the ship was slowly sweeping the green land that had been lying abreast of us all morning, till it was pointing fair at the funnel of the tug that was heading to the westwards of the breakwater, whilst a fellow at our helm was grinding at the wheel in obedience to the hoarse notes of Pipes, who bundled about on his bow-legs with an agility not a little surprising in a conformation so uncouth.

The scene now became very interesting. There was nobody to wave hat or handkerchief to, ashore; and our departure was therefore lacking in those white flutterings which, when prolonged, always heighten the going of a ship into a sort of agony: since, to *my notion*, any kind of lingering is a bitter mistake in leave-taking. *It should be a quick kiss, a quick hand-shake: for you see the*

tooth *must* be drawn, and who wants the dentist to gape sentimentally down one's throat, and then slowly, very slowly, haul upon his forceps?

But to return! No handkerchief fluttered upon our deck, as the backwash of the tug's paddles sent the white froth reeling along our bends; nevertheless, no sooner did we feel that we had fairly started than we became silent. Margaret Edwards slipped her hand into her father's; even the colonel looked thoughtful, and every eye was bent—with more or less of wistfulness in it—on the shore that was slowly gliding along as if getting up steam to dance in a circle about us; whilst outlines shifted, and green melted into brown, and brown into emerald. Drake's Island drew up on the starboard quarter, and looked like a block of pumice-stone afloat on the blue ripples, and the masts of ships in the dock beyond opened, with a glimpse of Sutton Pool in the east, and its forests of smacks' and colliers' spars. We were nearing the breakwater, when suddenly—flash!—bang! went the big gun they had been firing at intervals all the morning. But this time nobody took any notice, except timid Miss Inglefield, who popped her hands to her ears with a startled look out of the corners of her eyes. The truth is, the explosion accorded with our feelings; it seemed to say good-bye, like a salute designed for that purpose. And really we felt the want of some demonstration—for our departure from Plymouth Sound on a long voyage, without a friend ashore to wave to us, or in a boat over the side to call a farewell, made this part of the journey empty enough to find us willing to let the report of the cannon fill it.

All this while the windlass had been clanking, and the seamen singing at it; but this suddenly ceased, and whilst some fellows remained on the fore-castle to cat the anchor, others hoisted a portion of the fore-and-aft canvas, for the wind was eastward of south, and our road out of the Sound enabled those sails to draw. We were a little ship and light: being, of course, in ballast, though in excellent trim; and the tug having got a good grip, swept us seawards smartly. The breakwater twirled by as though it were pivoted in the centre and revolving; and you saw the summer water creeping up and down the outer incline of it in breaks of froth, like the white fingers of a blind woman groping.

There was so much to look at, coupled with the sense that a long voyage had fairly begun, that I suppose we had no words for one another. We excited little interest; smacks and open boats were passed close, but hardly an eye was lifted to our ship. Out at sea were three or four yachts—mere leaning shafts of moonlike silver; beyond them was a full-rigged ship hidden to her courses, and looking so wan that one almost started to feel that the phantasm was a towering, massive reality. It was a most lovely afternoon; the *mild wind was full of sweetness*, and whenever it swept along in a

quicker breathing, the heavens whence it came seemed to lighten by a shade, whilst over our quarter the blue deepened, as though the sapphire ether were a material elastic substance, that could be thickened or attenuated by a weight of air.

"Charming bit of scenery, this!" said Mr. Hornby, breaking the silence; "though I shouldn't like to be cast away yonder," pointing to Rame Head, "on a black night full of frost. What need is there to leave England for fine views and all that sort of thing, don't you know? This is quite a spot to spend one's honeymoon in, I declare!" and the little fellow, jerking himself on to his feet, pecked and peered around with his nostrils dilated, and admiration strong in his bright small eyes.

Mr. Edwards burst into a laugh: "Good gracious, Hornby! haven't you had enough of honeymoons? Isn't one sufficient in a lifetime?"

"It's the most tedious part of married life," exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield. "Mr. Aubyn, when you marry—oh, I beg pardon, perhaps you *are* married?"

"Not yet," said I.

"Then when you marry stipulate that there shall be no honeymoon," continued she. "You can't conceive how boring it is. People ought to plunge into life at once, instead of locking themselves up—unless, of course, they're *very* spoony, which so seldom happens, you know."

I glanced at the colonel; but I noticed then, and afterwards, that he took whatever his wife said as a matter of course. Miss Edwards did not look as if she thought Mrs. Inglefield's chatter entertaining. She tried to change the subject by saying to her father she hoped that the rheumatism would have left him long before the English coast was again in sight.

"Pray Heaven!" he exclaimed, with a tender glance at her, and then a bit of a scowl at his right ankle.

But Mrs. Inglefield was not to be swerved in this fashion.

"Should you ever undergo a honeymoon, Mr. Aubyn, you will recollect my words," said she, resuming the subject as though she had not heard Miss Edwards. "Charley, do you remember how quickly you bored me?"

The colonel cast his dull black eyes aloft with a grin.

"Mr. Hornby, will you believe me I found my husband *most* uninteresting, until I got into the outside world again and met other men? Then he improved a little."

Though her face was under a parasol, I thought it looked extremely powdery at that moment, and her dress being of a reflective material—a mixture of silk or something of that kind—glistened in the sunshine with the tension, as it rose and sank with her *breathing and movements*.

"No, no, Mrs. Inglefield," cried little Hornby, "confess that

instead of finding the colonel uninteresting, he was the one object in which your affection, hopes, admiration, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, were centred ! Eh, colonel, during your honeymoon, can you ever recollect Mrs. Inglefield removing her eyes from your face ?”

“Oh, hang me if I know, Hornby !” shouted the colonel. “It's too long ago, my boy, to recollect. I say ! when does the tug mean to let go of us ?”

As this question might have been heard on the forecable, Captain Pipes, who stood near the mizzen-rigging not far from us, answered, “She'll drop us when clear of Rame Head, sir.”

“Mr. Aubyn,” exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield, “what is that thing stuck up in the water, there ?” pointing to the sea over the bow.

“The Eddystone Lighthouse,” I replied.

“Oh, how interesting !” said Miss Inglefield, turning to look at the dim, delicate line.

“The great Smeaton built that,” said the colonel. “A wonderful work, by George ! It was there, you know, that a lightsman's wife grew so fat that she couldn't be got down the staircase, and they had to remove the lantern and lower her from the top.” He laughed boisterously, as a man sometimes will over a story he spoils.

“Charley, don't be horrid,” said Mrs. Inglefield.

Here Hornby called out : “I say, Pipes, did you ever hear of a woman growing so fat in that lighthouse yonder, that they had to hoist her through the roof ?”

Pipes approached and surveyed us with his inimitable and indescribable face.

“I can't say that ever I have,” he replied. “I don't say it's unreasonable. My mother when she died weighed three-and-twenty stone from the want of exercise, and she was reckoned the finest woman in Brixham, though it's not for me to say it. There's but little walking to be got in a lighthouse.—‘steady !’” he shouted to the man at the wheel. “D'ye want to run away with the tug ?—What I've heard about that lighthouse, ladies, is this : There were two keepers, and one died. The relief was long coming, in consequence of foul weather. When they boarded the lighthouse they found the body in a fearful state of decay, and the lonesome lightsman pretty nigh daft—quite moony, ma'am,” addressing Mrs. Inglefield. “Well, when they had polished up his senses, he explained that he hadn't dared cast his dead mate overboard for fear he should be thought to have murdered him ; so for days and days he and that corpse had been together. The dead chap's sperrit hung about for a tidy bit, I've heard, and would sometimes turn to and trim the lamps, and frighten the keepers in a way to whiten the hair upon their heads. He was ultimately

disposed of by a gale of wind. It blew tremendously hard one middle watch, and it was reckoned the ghost, unable to bear up against the weight of wind, was carried out into the Atlantic Ocean."

"Perhaps we shall come across him," said I.

"I hope not. I don't like ghosts. I *believe* in them!" cried the colonel.

"You!" shouted little Hornby.

"Yes, man, I. When I was in Burmah the ghost of an old friend of mine, Sir Winterton Sikes, then stationed at Hong-Kong, came to my bedside and told me to write at once to his mother at Marsh Hall in Yorkshire, and tell her that he was dead of dysentery. Well, I didn't do so, and I regretted it, by George! for, some months after, I heard that my friend had died on the very night he had come to my bedside."

"Of dysentery?" asked Hornby.

"Certainly," shouted the colonel.

"Lord bless me now!" exclaimed Captain Pipes.

"It's quite true," remarked Mrs. Inglefield, speaking with an air of importance. "Charley told me his dream, and I put it down to indigestion."

"It wasn't a dream," cried the colonel. "It was a ghost."

Pipes, muttering "Lord bless me now!" several times, stepped back to his former place, and then sent his voice roaring along the deck in an order to get all three lower topsails loosed, ready for sheeting home.

We were now soon to be left to ourselves. The sea beyond Rame Head lay broad and blue, and the red and white bands of the Eddystone Lighthouse, with now and again a sort of shiver of brightness in its glass summit, were plainly to be made out against the light azure of the sky over the horizon on the port bow. The topsails had not been long loosed when the tug let fall our tow rope, and went sweeping round away from us, leaving a clean, throbbing, seething arc of foam on the water, whilst her skipper flourished a farewell to us from a paddle-box. The row that now followed put an end to conversation among us. The crew split themselves into several gangs; one dragged the hawser on to the forecastle, others sheeted home the topsails, others hoisted such jibs and staysails as remained to be set; every job was productive of a hoarse song, and these rude and harsh notes were mingled with the orders of Captain Pipes, the calls of the mates, and the occasional shrill whistling of the boat-swain.

I drew away from my companions, and stood looking with much interest at the busy scene that recalled my boyish experiences *with a sharpness I had not found in them for many a long year.* *The crew seemed to work with a will, and sprawled about in*

true "lively hearty" style. To be sure they were new brooms, and should therefore sweep well. One after another the square sails were loosed and set, amid cries from the tops and cross-trees, and long-drawn songs on deck. There was a rough music in the grinding of hempen running gear travelling over rattling sheaves in measured cadence with the voices of the men singing, that was pleasant to listen to. It resembled nothing in the world that I could imagine, and was as much a portion of the ship as the ribs which framed her, or the planks which decked her. And pretty it was to witness the gradual growth of the canvas, like the shoulders of white clouds looking one over another; first the top-sails, and then the topgallant sails, and then the royals, with stay-sails between, and the spanker hollowing aft, and jibs curving from the masthead to the jibbooms, until the *Silver Sea* wore all her beauty, and the water tinkled along her bends like a ringing of little bells. The sun was to the westward of south, and Pipes was steering the ship right into his flashing wake. Maybe the cheery old skipper would have preferred to give the helmsman a course that promised a wider offing, but the ship was close-hauled, every bow-line taut, the lower yards against the lee rigging, and the utmost southing possible would not allow us to approach the Eddystone within ten miles.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. INGLESFIELD ADMIRES THE SHIP.

PRESENTLY Miss Edwards and Miss Inglesfield left their chairs, and they were followed by little Hornby, whose admiration for the former lady was evidently very great. I had posted myself on the weather quarter, and was praising the cut of the canvas and the whole appearance of the handsome clipper ship to Captain Pipes when the three came along, leaving Mr. Edwards and the colonel talking, and Mrs. Inglesfield ogling the sea through an opera-glass.

"Yes, ladies, fairly started at last," said the little fellow as he approached me, ambling alongside Miss Edwards and giving his hair a twist forward over his ear; "we shall soon be losing sight of the coast of the old home; but people must leave England if they want to visit foreign parts. The equator's not to be crossed, nor Cape Town inspected, nor Table Mountain climbed, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, without turning one's back on the tight little island. Eh, isn't it so, Mr. Aubyn? aren't I right?"

"Quite right, Mr. Hornby," I replied. "If the world's to be

viewed one must sink Great Britain many leagues behind the azure main that she rules."

"Miss Inglefield wants to view the *Silver Sea* under full sail, and Mr. Hornby says this is the right place to post ourselves in," said Miss Edwards.

"There's only one better place, Miss," exclaimed Pipes, "and that's the end of the flying jibboom."

"And where may that be?" she inquired, lifting her grand eyes the masts.

"Ye see the bowsprit," he answered, pointing forwards: "well, the flying jibboom end is the extremity of the spar that shoots out beyond the bowsprit there. It's not accessible by females unless they're of the pattern of the sweetheart as followed young Billy Taylor in the ditty. Next to that, here's the proper place, Miss, as Mr. Hornby says."

Miss Inglefield went to the rail, but there was a short row of hencoops that prevented her from leaning over, so Hornby begged her to step on top of one of the coops and hold his hand. This she did, but it would not do; the little chap was too short, though he strained on his toes like a crowing cock; and she was about to jump down when Pipes rolled up to her with his arm out.

"Will you step up, Miss Edwards?" said I. "I'll support you."

She did so at once, her hand in mine. I may as well own that never yet had the mere holding of a woman's hand caused me the strange delight hers did, gloved as it was. She stood erect, a noble figure indeed; I marked the curve of her bust, the clear cutting of her handsome profile against the windward blue, the trembling of her black hair upon her forehead as the slight heel of the ship made her lean away from me into the breeze, whilst she looked up at the white cloths and down at the glossy green of the bends with eyes on fire with the soft brightness that flowed down into them out of the shining sails, and that came trembling off the water.

"This, indeed, is the place to see the ship, Mr. Hornby!" she exclaimed. "She looks very beautiful. Agnes, what would I give to be able to paint the *Silver Sea* as we now view her!"

"There is no brush in the world that could represent those blue gleamings," answered Miss Inglefield, holding tight to Pipes's great fist and pointing into the distance where a space of water lay a darkish azure with a shine in it from contrast with a current, or else a flaw of wind that gave the sea an appearance of ice where it was.

"You have a sailor's eye for atmospheric effect," said I.

She looked around at me with a kind of grateful smile, as one not much used to getting compliments.

Meanwhile, Hornby, full of sympathetic gallantry, was running his eyes over the vessel with a fixed smile.

"I can just see the ship's copper, Mr. Aubyn," said Miss Edwards, tightening her clasp of my fingers as she stretched a

trifle away from me. "Agnes, is not the contrast lovely? See! the water is a delicate green, like glass, as it washes along the dull yellow. How strange, for it is blue elsewhere! How the bubbles and beads break as they glide past, and every foam-bell shines like a silver ball! I dare say whilst they last they reflect a perfect image—a tiny image—of the ship. How exquisite!" and then, gazing aloft: "Look, Agnes, at the wee sails on the very top! . . Mr. Aubyn, don't let me tire your arm."

"There is no fear of that," said I.

"What is the name of that little sail up there?"

"The mainroyal," cried Hornby, determined to be "in it."

"Is it not like a cloud? It might have been cut out of the moon. Do you see, Agnes, how it is shot with lustre as though it were satin? If I had wings I would fly up there. What a sense of liberty a sailor must feel at that height, close to the sky, and this great world of ocean far down!"

The quick heaving of her bosom showed something like real magic in the inspiration her dark eyes were drinking in. Pipes's gaze was riveted on her. Hornby, rubbing his hands so swiftly together that he might have passed for a marooned seaman endeavouring to get fire out of two pieces of wood, cried, "I always knew that the *Silver Sea* was a pretty ship, but you're making a poem of her, Miss Edwards; you're seeing beauties I never dreamt she possessed. Eh, Mr. Aubyn? Isn't it perfectly true that the mainroyal, viewed thus, might have been cut out of the moon instead of a commonplace bolt of canvas, and sewed with twine by a horny hand, fitted with a sailmaker's palm, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

A sudden squeal from the neighbourhood of the skylight caused us to bend our eyes in that direction. It was an ejaculation from Mrs. Inglefield, who, springing up, came waddling towards us, crying, "Mind, you imprudent girls! you will tumble into the water. What are you doing, Agnes?"

Down jumped Miss Inglefield, and Miss Edwards sprang with a fine dancing grace on to the deck, her face rich with colour and her eyes radiant with the sunshine that had entered them.

"There was no occasion to be alarmed, Mrs. Inglefield," said Mr. Hornby. "The young ladies were quite safe, I assure you."

"Agnes, I am surprised that you should have put yourself into such a position," continued Mrs. Inglefield, rounding on her daughter, without heeding little Hornby. "What were you doing on that box?"

"Looking at the ship, mamma."

"At what ship?" cried the lady, staring out to sea.

"At the ship we're in," said I.

"And what is there to see, Mr. Aubyn?" she inquired with an *affected roll of her eyes up the masts.*

Miss Edwards answered for me : " The full picture of the vessel, Mrs. Inglefield. It is a beautiful sight, and I am sure I don't know why I jumped down when you screamed, unless it was because you frightened me, for I could have gone on contentedly looking for another hour."

" Let me hand you up again," said I.

" No, thank you ; Mrs. Inglefield might give another scream," she replied, sinking her voice.

" Let me encourage you to take a peep, Mrs. Inglefield," said Mr. Hornby. " It quite inspired Miss Edwards."

" Oh, I'm afraid I daren't. Are you quite sure there is no danger?" she inquired ; and now you saw that she was centralizing herself, to become a cynosure, the interesting individual of the party for the moment, and therefore growing happy. Her confounded vanity beat my time. It was not only contemptible in the splendid presence of Margaret Edwards ; it was bad as making part of a stout, powdered woman of fifty, of a veal-like complexion and of yellow hair to which the colour of her eyes gave the lie direct. Yes, I can be cynical and bitter at times, my friends. I never liked this woman, and I am not sorry, Mrs. Inglefield, that you should now have a chance of reading my deliberate opinion of you.

Pipes had slunk out of the way and was looking after the ship in the gangway.

" Not an atom of danger," cried little Hornby, answering Mrs. Inglefield's question. " If you'll step up, I'll hold you, and in such a way that if you go overboard I must go too."

This did not suit her ; she glanced askant at him and then gushed out : " Oh, I think I must look if it is worth seeing. Give me your hand, Agnes," and she made a feint of putting her foot on the hencoop, but in reality took care to do no more than exhibit a tight new boot with a long heel in the middle of the sole.

Hornby stepped back with an affronted sniff and feigned an interest in the leeward sea. The lady's manœuvring was only too palpably meant for me ; there was no help for it ; so, " Permit me to give you my hand," said I, and up she got with the grace of a goose stepping out of a pond.

" Where am I to look, Mr. Aubyn?" she exclaimed. " Please tell me ; and oh, be careful of me!"

" It's the whole picture of the ship that your daughter and Miss Edwards found beautiful," I replied, not greatly enjoying the fleshy grip of her hand.

" What I thought so lovely, mamma, was the contrast of the ship's copper with the water and the foam," said Miss Inglefield, who rather surprised me by not looking ashamed of her mother's ridiculous posture-making ; but she was used to it, I suppose ; had *been born to it as a maternal feature*, and was as little sensible of *it as a mulatto is of the ebony skin of Massa Jumbo, his farder.*

But Mrs. Inglesfield was not a lady to seek for natural beauties outside her looking-glass, nor one to find them, even if she took the trouble to peer. She had mounted the hencoop to exhibit her figure, and was holding on to me because she had some appreciation of the picturesque effect a young man of a loftier stature than Hornby, and on the whole better-looking than Moses Pipes, can import into a bit of grouping. There was a satirical gleam in Miss Margaret's eyes that fully illustrated her thoughts. On the other hand Miss Agnes watched her mother with a little anxiety, as though wanting her to see enough to justify her (Agnes) in getting on to the hencoop. The sea was wonderfully calm; there was not the faintest fold to elevate or depress by a hand's-breadth the steady pointing of the jibboom; and the weight of wind was so uniform that the ship's inclination remained constant; hence there was no occasion for Mrs. Inglesfield to sway about under pretence of balancing herself; nevertheless had she been a circus-rider standing on the back of a flying steed, and preparing for a header through a hoop, she could not have rolled into more attitudes.

"Oh, be careful of me, Mr. Aubyn!" she would exclaim from time to time, as if, forsooth! she were some tender and forlorn damsel with nothing in the wide world but my breast to look to should she suddenly capsize. I never regretted Hornby's stature more than then. He was the first to suggest the enjoyment, and, confound him, he ought to have had it! My heart is for leaving a woman's figure alone when its poetic growth ceases, and it becomes a body rather than a form. To criticize is mean and ungentelemanly when one's opinions are not challenged. But description is fair enough when a woman of fifty, holding a young man's hand, climbs awkwardly on to a ship's hencoop and stands a bold conformation against the sky, accepting the furtive grins of hairy fore-castle sailors as tributes to her admirable proportions, and smirking so as to satisfy the kindest observer that if she has one conviction stronger and more deeply rooted than another, it is that she is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever, and that her loveliness increases, and that she will never pass into nothingness.

"Hallo, Amy!" shouted the colonel, suddenly spying her just as she had spied her daughter; "what on earth are you doing up there? what are you trying to see?—Anything strange in sight, Hornby?"

"The poor man gets so nervous as he grows old, Mr. Aubyn," said Mrs. Inglesfield. "Please help me down. The ship indeed looks beautiful, and—and—do you know I am positively certain that I shan't be able to jump?"

"Colonel," I sang out, not seeing my way here at all, "will you come and help Mrs. Inglesfield off this hencoop?"

"Oh, I think I can manage," said she, "if you'll let me put my *hands upon your shoulders*."

This was as bad as asking me to put my arm round her waist and help her down in that fashion. I glanced at Miss Edwards and saw her struggling with laughter. If Mrs. Inglefield chose to be ridiculous I was determined that she should not make me look absurd; so I said, "Don't attempt to jump. The hencoop is higher than you imagine;" and the colonel arriving I exclaimed, "You had better lift her off, sir," and let go her hand, and backed away, whilst her husband cast his arms about her waist.

Had I not fore-calculated her weight I should have been able to estimate it with tolerable accuracy by watching the manœuvring that followed. First of all the colonel's hat fell off. "Now be careful, my dear!" he roared; "whatever you do don't jump on my feet. For God's sake—gently—mind how you come!" he shouted as she fell towards him. The least lurch of the ship must have sent the pair of them sprawling at that moment; as it was there was slope enough in the deck to render great caution necessary. Enough if I say that before Mrs. Inglefield was safely removed from the hencoop, the colonel was not only without his hat, but the left side of his shirt collar was broken flat on to his coat; his watch, torn up from his waistcoat pocket, dangled at the end of the chain; and I had watched with some interest a couple of buttons roll away like sixpences to leeward.

"A narrow escape for me," said I to Miss Edwards.

She dared not answer me, and to conceal her merriment walked right aft past the fellow at the helm, who was grinning as though the whole performance had been undertaken for his exclusive diversion.

After all this the colonel went below to brush his hair and change his collar, and was followed by his wife and daughter. The rest of us went to Mr. Edwards, who sat smoking a cigar in an American chair, with his legs hoisted up and his head sloped back.

"What's been the matter?" said he. "It pains my neck to turn my head. I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Inglefield on the hencoop and heard you call the colonel, Aubyn."

I explained, whilst Miss Edwards laughed continuously.

"I say, Edwards," mumbled little Hornby, taking a precautionary squint into the cabin through the sky-light, "I like the colonel, and Miss Agnes is very delightful. But Mrs. Inglefield, eh? good-hearted, I'm sure, and all that sort of thing, don't you know; but a trifle conceited, eh? and not over polite, I think. Miss Edwards, you heard me offer her my hand, yet without thanking me she turned to her daughter and asked for hers!"

Mr. Edwards laughed heartily. "She's thoroughly good-natured, as you say, Hornby," he exclaimed. "She's a woman, and therefore you can't quarrel with her for being a little conceited. Don't you know the sex yet? what would they be without vanity? Water,

Hornby! tasteless water, man; which, as you are aware, very few men, and least of all teetotallers, find palatable. Probably Mrs. Inglesfield is a little over-dashed with spirit—a trifle *too* strong, let us say—for every one's taste; but at sea individuality is a useful feature in a companion as a source of amusement, and I don't think that either she or the colonel," said he looking at me, "will disappoint us."

Here little Hornby begged not to be misunderstood. Heaven knew he was the last man in the world to say an unkind thing of anybody, least of all of a lady! Only he thought it a mistake—mind, he spoke under correction—for a middle-aged woman with a grown-up daughter to mount a hencoop, and cut capers and all that sort of thing, don't you know, as if she were learning the tight-rope.

"Had you supported her, you would be entitled to complain," said I.

"Mr. Aubyn," exclaimed Miss Edwards, with her eyes flashing with laughter, "what would you have done had she insisted on your dismounting her?"

"I should have called to the sailors to spread a sail to receive her in," I replied.

Mr. Edwards broke into a loud "ha-ha!" and then called out to the chief mate to tell him if the ship was moving. Mr. Alan Bird, whose sailorly appearance it was pleasant to look at, cast his eye over the side, and said, "We're slipping through it a full five, sir."

"God bless me!" exclaimed Mr. Edwards: "who would have supposed it? Margaret, if this weather lasts another month I shall be able to dance a waltz with you."

"Are you fond of dancing, Miss Edwards?" inquired Hornby, with much admiration in his face.

"Very."

"So am I. We'll have a good many dances before we reach the Cape, I hope. There's nothing like a ship's deck for revolving on; and a slight rolling and pitching motion helps wonderfully."

"Can you dance on your toes, Hornby?" asked Edwards.

"Only on my toes," answered the little fellow. "What other part should a man who *can* dance use? His heels? Heaven save you! Skimming is only possible on the toes, eh, Mr. Aubyn? I'd as lief pirouette on wooden legs as dance flat and all that sort of thing, don't you know!"

"Well," said Mr. Edwards, speaking slowly through his nose in enjoyment of his cigar, "*this* is pleasure. *This* may be termed happiness. Look at the beautiful blue over the masts! Faith, we might as well be gliding over a silk carpet as for any water that's to be felt *here*. *The deuce* is in it if this don't cure me."

I saw his daughter look around her, and noticed how her beautiful face reflected the delight the sea-picture gave her. I had often heard of that old-fashioned word *sensibility*—the capacity, I believe, of being emotionally affected—but never could have imagined such an illustration of its meaning as I found in this girl. You'd remark the light kindling in her face, her red lips parting, her dark eyes softening and brightening at once, and swear that she must be able to see deeper than most mortals could fathom, to get out of mere blueness and sunshine the spirit that worked the quiet transport in her she'd exhibit.

Still, on that afternoon the *Silver Sea* and the wide expanse of water trembling under the gentle breeze formed a spectacle to account for a delight and admiration in any one. On our right the Cornish coast hung dim and blue on the horizon, more like a line of vapour that the breeze had settled away to leeward than a range of cliffs. You'd follow it into blobs and films till your eye came to a sail gleaming like a star, and then right away round on the port side the dome of the heavens stood like an inverted sapphire cup, supported by the dark-blue floor of the sea, the boundaries of which, however, were of crystalline paleness. In the south-west, the sun hung in unclouded glory, and the wake of him—a shaft of white fire—shivered like liquid simmering silver under the gentle but steady air that was keeping our sails full, and inclining the ship and forcing her through it almost noiselessly save under the counter, whence rose the sounds of eddying water and the seething of bubbles floating in the furrow ploughed up by the great share of our keel. The sunshine was nearly ahead as we steered, and the concavities aloft were in shadow: this made the picture the more beautiful, and seeing Miss Edwards looking I asked her to observe the silvery glint in the sky at the edges of the sails, as though the brightness pouring down on them flowed off in an argent haze from the roundness in front. But she had already noticed that. It was the topmost canvas that appeared to take her fancy most.

"They are perfect summer clouds!" she exclaimed, sending her beautiful glance up to them and leaning back till you saw the white of her throat like snow in the sun, whilst her noble figure lay in an almost floating posture, reminding me of a painting I once saw that represented one of earth's early daughters gazing into the heavens for the star that was to signal her angel-lover's intention to descend to her. Hornby, casting his glance upon her at that moment, struck an attitude of admiration.

"One hears a good deal about the beauty of sailing-ships," she continued half-dreamily, more as if she were thinking aloud than talking to me; "but few people, I dare say, realize the genius, the *exquisite* taste that is shown in the arrangement of such sails as *those up there*. How perfectly they fit the poles they are stretched

upon ! Are those things called poles, Mr. Aubyn ?" said she, with her eyes still fixed on the far-up mainroyal.

"They are called yards," I answered.

"How the sails mount !" she continued, "rising one above another and growing smaller and smaller. What could be more graceful ? And what a crowd of sails—four on the mast behind, and ten on the other two masts ; and how many on the bowsprit and between the masts, Mr. Aubyn ?"

I reckoned, and including the spanker made out ten.

"That makes twenty-four !"

"And you may add ten more in the shape of studding-sails."

"Thirty-four ! is not that impossible ? The ship could not carry them ; their weight would upset her."

Here Mr. Edwards, who had been listening, flipped the ash from his cigar and said, "Hornby, don't some ships carry more canvas than this craft ? are not their sails called sky-sails ?"

"Why, yes, certainly—sky-sails, moon-sails, cloud-cleaners, star-gazers, jib-o'-jibs, ringtails, jimmy greens, water-sails, and all that sort of thing, don't you know !" replied the little fellow, airing these marine terms with a laughable air of complacency.

"It is wonderful that sailors should be able to remember such names," said Miss Edwards, sitting erect and speaking in her usual manner. Her father and Hornby had broken the spell, and she had come down from the sky where the favourite little royals were to the prosaic life of the ship's decks.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. HORNBY IS UPSET.

AT the rate of five knots an hour it did not take the *Silver Sea* long to run out of sight of land. A good while before the sun stood low, the sea-line around us was unbroken by any other points than those of sails. There was a new moon overhead, a mere paring of mother-o'-pearl, and there was nothing else in the sky : it was just a concave of deep blue, and the sun as he went down it grew large and red, and his fiery spokes waned till his disappearance promised the vanishment of a clean crimson disk. But as the afternoon progressed the breeze freshened ; the sea darkened under it, and the ripples as they curled took an edging of white that made a prism of the deep beneath the slanting lustre. It crept yet a point or so farther into the east, which enabled Captain Pipes to brace in the yards a little ; and the *Silver Sea* went along as quietly and swiftly as a flying gull, unrolling a gleaming ribband behind her.

But all on a sudden—and it was past six o'clock and I was waiting for the summons to go below and prepare myself for the dinner-table—the jibboom of the ship slightly rose, and there was a gentle floating heave along the whole length of the vessel that seemed to pass like a kind of yearning through the very bowels of her; and then the jibboom sank, and then it rose again.

"A hint of the Atlantic swell, Mr. Bird," said I to the chief mate, who had charge of the deck.

"Yes," he replied; "it is not often that one finds the English Channel flat as a pond so far down."

The swell was exceedingly light at first, scarcely perceptible indeed; but after a few breathings it became more of a heave, and the swing of the ship over it, though trifling enough, was distinctly appreciable.

"I wonder if I mean to be sick, Mr. Bird," said I.

"Nonsense, sir!" he exclaimed encouragingly.

"Well, I don't know. A six months' training won't help a man after fourteen or fifteen years. This is just the movement to try me, any way—slow and deliberate."

I was determined to test myself at once, not wishing to wait to make a fool of myself at the dinner-table; because though I had not in the smallest degree set myself up for a nautical man on the strength of my early voyage, yet I could not but reflect that Mr. Edwards and, to a certain extent, his daughter were disposed to think of me and treat me as one; and there was perhaps a reasonable pride in my desire to support the character that had been forced upon me. Accordingly I stepped right aft astern of the man at the wheel, where the motion of the ship was best to be felt—the swell was dead west and took us fair on the starboard bow—and here I put my whole mind into the heaving, thinking of it and trying to feel it with all my might. Such, of course, is the best way to be sea-sick, the shortest cut into that affliction: but nothing came of it; not the least feeling of nausea troubled me. Mr. Bird watched me with curiosity.

"Well," said he, approaching and laughing; "how do you feel, sir?"

"As well as you, Mr. Bird,—with an appetite unimpaired, which is a very excellent assurance," I replied, much in love with myself, for I had had considerable misgivings; "if I can stand this I can stand worse."

As I said this Mr. Edwards's head appeared in the companion. He and the others had been below since half-past five or thereabouts. I saw the steward at his elbow helping him up, and I advanced to give the old gentleman a hoist out of the hatchway. He grasped my hand and said, "Aubyn, the ship's rolling, by *George!*"

"There's a trifle of swell come along—very faint though," said I, noticing that he was rather yellow.

"D'ye feel at all sick?" he asked, clinging to me and looking about him uneasily.

"Not in the least," said I.

"Then I do," he exclaimed. "Perhaps it'll pass off here. Will you shove a chair near the rail there—in case? I can't run, you know," he added with a hollow laugh, the very ghost of his usual hearty explosions.

I did as he requested, and helped him to sit down; then asked if he thought his daughter would like to come on deck, as I should be happy to conduct her. He shook his head and waved his hand, in token that he was not just then very capable of speech.

"Like a dear fellow, don't hang about me," said he; so I left him and rejoined the mate.

The heave was long, slow, and rhythmical, with a true deep-water touch in it, and the canvas would flatten in a bit as the ship leaned, whilst you heard the churning of foam forward when her forefoot took the gleaming slants. I talked with Mr. Bird about the vessel and her crew, and found him to be an extremely agreeable, well-spoken man, plain and straight in his remarks, and a person of experience in his profession. He told me he had had command for two years of a ship trading to the East Indies, but lost the berth in consequence of the insolvency of the firm the vessel belonged to, and for six months he had been kicking his heels ashore vainly seeking employment. He had a wife and child, and therefore the obligation of obtaining work lay very heavy upon him; and when he received an offer to go as chief mate of the *Silver Sea* he accepted the berth thankfully.

"The long and short of it is, sir," said he, "there are too many captains and mates. Some of us are much fitter for the forecastle where men are wanted than the quarter-deck; but we all wish to be bosses, and so scores of us are starving."

Meanwhile, as we conversed, walking up and down, I gazed occasionally at Mr. Edwards, who sat very still with his face turned towards the sea, and his left hand grasping a belaying-pin that pierced the rail where he was. But presently sundry jerkings of the elbow, accompanied by a bowing movement followed by convulsive recoils, warned me that the crisis was not far off; and true enough in a few minutes the old fellow was exceedingly ill.

"It'll do him good," said Mr. Bird, with a touch of the compassion that your genuine sailor always feels for a nauseated fellow-creature. "It'll clear out his long-shore swash, and that should carry off his rheumatism."

I went and stood near him—out of his sight however—prepared to assist him should his gout prove a hindrance to his free and

necessary posture-making ; but he managed very well ; indeed you would not have suspected that he was afflicted with swellings and acute stiffnesses ; he was out of his chair and overhung the rail, and had he been a sailor drawing a bucket of water over the side he could not have rolled about on his legs more elastically. After a little his throes passed and he fell into his chair again with his handkerchief to his face.

"Can I be of use to you, Mr. Edwards?" I inquired, stepping round.

He withdrew his handkerchief and looked at me, and I started back, utterly amazed, and for the moment seriously alarmed. I hardly recognized him ; his face appeared to have shrunk to half its former size ; his lips had disappeared and his mouth was a little cave, and his chin close enough to his nose to serve as a portrait for a man of eighty.

"Good heavens !" cried I, much agitated by the extraordinary transformation that had been wrought in a few minutes. "What is the matter with you, Mr. Edwards?"

"I have loft my teef—they fell out when I wav sick," he mumbled ; and now that he opened his mouth I perceived that where a row of glittering teeth had sparkled there was nothing to be seen but gum, quite toothless gum. Yes ; in his convulsions he had cast his pearls to the marine swine, he had hove them overboard, and his physiognomy had undergone an amazing and alarming change.

"I have anover fet below," said he, producing a bunch of keys and picking out one of them ; "they're in a cufe in ve yellow portmanteau in ve lower bunk. Will you kindly bring vem to me?"

I took the keys and hurried below, grateful for the errand, for my suppressed laughter came very near to exploding me. I entered his berth and found the yellow portmanteau and the box of teeth inside, but had to linger in order to exhaust my mirth. When I returned I found him recovering from another attack. By this time I had my gravity under command, and said, very soberly, "Here are your teeth, Mr. Edwards ; but I shouldn't advise you to put them into your mouth until your nausea has abated, for it would be no joke to lose these too. Shall I fetch you a basin?"

He declined, mumbling that he felt better ; and then turning his head aside he deftly slipped the teeth into his mouth and looked at me once more with his face restored to its usual proportions. He dried his eyes and said, "I feel relieved. It's a great nuisance that I should have lost those teeth. If these go we must turn back. I never thought of such a thing happening when I asked you to put a chair for me here. I hate the fuss of a basin," he added, *pulling off his hat and wiping his face.* "However, I shall not *imperil these.* I'll extract them if I feel another attack coming on.

Kindly call to the steward, Aubyn, for a little brandy, will you?" I did so. "I am certainly relieved," he continued;" maybe this is the physic I have been wanting all along;" and he lay back in his chair, still very yellow, but apparently in no great suffering.

The steward arrived with some brandy, and my friend helped himself to a caulker.

"I shall not dine to-day," said he to the man.

"Very well, sir."

I now discovered that I had not heard the first dinner-bell, and that the second would ring in about ten minutes; so, as Mr. Edwards said he'd rather be left alone, I dived below, where another hearty fit of laughter pretty well cleared out the merriment that was left in me.

The breeze freshening with the decline of the sun was giving the ship a real sailing heel; and the speed of the swell coming at her combined with her own floating rush at the brows of the folds rendered the motion of the vessel tolerably lively. The Inglefields' cabin was next to mine, and through the bulkhead I could hear noise enough to satisfy me that one or both of its inmates were ill. The sound, however, was muffled, and sometimes I thought it sounded more like an argument or even a quarrel than sea-sickness. However, no time was allowed to make sure, nor indeed was the matter of the least importance; the second bell rang and I stepped forth.

The cabin looked extremely cheerful. Both tables were laid for dinner, and the red lustre that the setting sun filled the air with came through the open skylight and shot a rosy brightness into glass and plate and mirror. The warm wind blew down and kept all the plants trembling. I was the first to put in an appearance, but Captain Pipes was not long after me; he stepped forth from his cabin with his hair freshly brushed, and looking burnished with the oil upon it, and his face radiant with the polishing of a towel; he had likewise shipped a clean collar, and he wore a velvet waistcoat that was embellished with brass buttons and a hair watch-guard of the thickness of signal halliards. Next emerged little Hornby, and then the Inglefields' cabin door was opened and the colonel protruding his head shouted, "Is dinner ready?" On being told that it was he came out, carefully closing the door behind him. Almost at the same moment Miss Edwards approached and said to the colonel, "Agnes has asked me to excuse her. She is lying down. The motion of the vessel has upset her."

"A nice look out!" said the colonel in his loud voice; "her mother's been fearfully ill too. But she's better now, I am happy to say. Can I be of use to Agnes?"

"I think not," answered Miss Edwards; "she believes she will not suffer much if she keeps quite still." Then looking around her, "*Where is my father?*" she asked.

"On deck," I replied. "He will not join us. He, too, has been a little upset; but I left him very much better, and desirous of being alone."

"Pray excuse me, I should like to see him," she exclaimed, and went to the companion ladder. I noticed that Hornby made a staggering movement as though to offer to hand her on deck; but he did no more than that, either for fear that his services would be declined or because he did not feel equal to much exertion. Captain Pipes was before me, but she wanted no help; she danced up the ladder with her magnificent hair uncovered, and we stood waiting for her to return.

"Is Edwards very sick, Mr. Aubyn?" asked Hornby.

"He *has* been—very sick indeed," I answered.

"It's a very unpleasant movement, Pipes," said the little fellow. "It's not a healthy roll, a fair honest plunging and all that sort of thing, don't you know!"

"Oh, you mustn't take any notice of it, sir," responded Pipes. "It's too trifling for the likes of you, Mr. Hornby, to think of."

"My wife has been confoundedly ill," exclaimed the colonel; 'hang me if I think I ought to leave her. However, she can call out. May as well go and see my daughter whilst we're waiting," and he entered her berth.

"I really think Mr. Edwards should have shipped a stewardess," said I. "It's impossible for us to attend upon the young ladies in their berths, Mr. Hornby, glad as we should be to do so; and if Miss Edwards should be sea-sick, who's to attend to her and her companion?"

"*She's* not going to be sea-sick, Mr. Aubyn," exclaimed Pipes. "Besides, nausea don't last long. A stoardess would only be in the road, as I told Mr. Edwards. I'm not fond of 'em, they get spoilt by tips, and grow impudent, and there's no managing them. The last stoardess I was shipmate with, Mr. Hornby, was drunk, morning, noon, and night. She twice set the vessel on fire, and stole a regular proper freight of wearing apparel out of the ladies' boxes."

After a little Miss Edwards returned and said to me, "Papa prefers to be left alone. He is much better." And then throwing a half-bashful look around she exclaimed, "Am I to be the only lady?"

"Yes," cried the colonel, arriving just then. "Agnes is helpless and my wife's in bed, or next door to it."

She looked concerned at this, but made no fuss about being the only lady, and sat down. My seat was next hers. Pipes took the chair at the head, and Hornby and the colonel faced me. This filled the table; but in spite of three of the party being away the *other table was wanted, too*: for shortly after we had taken our *places the chief mate—relieved by the second officer—came below*

for his dinner. I now discovered that in respect of attendance we were better off than I had supposed, for a smooth-faced German appeared on the scene and helped the steward to wait upon us. It was a real treat to watch old Pipes. The head of the table was his place by rights; though he did not look the sort of man to appropriate it in the face of his owner, or Mr. Edwards, if the programme had not arranged for him to be there. He was very nervous, wore a fixed smile, and manœuvred with his spoon with many an askant peep round to see what the others did.

Hornby said he did not want any soup, and declined it, I thought, with an air of suppressed irritability. We were all of us rather taciturn at the first start, just briefly expressing our regret that the others were not well enough to join us, whilst I could see the colonel pricking his ears for any sound in his wife's cabin. The table was well aft—abaft the mizzen-mast—and the heave of the vessel was very perceptible. The trays hanging from the upper deck swung steadily, bulkheads creaked, and the soup in our plates showed the variableness of the ship's posture by its inclination.

"What's the matter, Hornby?" suddenly bawled the colonel in the little fellow's ear. "You don't seem up to the mark. Anything wrong?"

"Nothing—nothing. The excellent lunch I made has spoilt my appetite," answered Hornby. "Steward, a little brandy-and-water. Brandy's an excellent tonic, Miss Edwards," and he smiled upon her with a face that was slowly growing ashen.

I saw how it was, and out of sympathy forbore to glance at him. But maybe in saying this I am assuming more kindness than I felt; for to tell the truth any share of attention he might have claimed from me I bestowed unreservedly on Miss Edwards. If the fascination of this girl was felt by me when the length of a ship's deck separated us, how would it be, do you suppose, when we sat side by side, so close that our elbows almost touched, and when the fragrance that clothed her as an atmosphere invested me? The motion of the ship had no more effect upon her, apparently, than upon Pipes. The eyes she turned on me preserved their wonted fires; the rich damask lay unpaled upon her cheeks; the breeze had caressed her hair when she ran on deck, and slightly disordered it, and methought she looked the more beautiful for the blown and tossed appearance of the tresses over her forehead.

"How many voyages have you made," I asked her, "to account for your indifference to this motion?"

"I never was on the sea before, except when crossing to France," she answered. "I am sure I cannot say why the movement does not affect me. Yet I certainly do not feel it."

"Because you're a born sailor, miss," said Pipes, looking at her with profound admiration. "The way you jumped up that ladder

satisfied my mind. There can be no sea 'twixt this and Agulhas that can trouble *you*."

The compliment intended was immense, and she evidently enjoyed it.

"Hornby, you should have tried the soup: it was really excellent," cried the colonel. "Did you engage the cook?"

The little man answered "No" in a faint voice.

"I hope he understands curry," continued the colonel, talking as usual at the top of his voice, as though endeavouring to make himself heard by people fifty yards off. "And will you be having sausages down in your *menoos*, Hornby? It's an odd question," cried he, staring into the plate of beef the steward had put before him: "but there's nothing I enjoy more for breakfast than pork sausages and bacon—good, fat, prime bacon, not the rashers you'd cut from a Juan Fernandez boar. Steward, some mustard. Couldn't look at such things at night, Captain Pipes, but in the morning a man can take liberties with his digestion."

"There's worse eating than sausages and bacon," said the skipper.

Chatter of this kind was not conducive to Hornby's restoration. He turned his eyes—from which all lustre had fled—sideways on to the noisy and heedless colonel, and then pretended to eat from the plate before him; but he was fast succumbing; heroic as his efforts were, he could not stave off the crisis, though I believe he would have gone on battling for some time longer had it not been for Mrs. Inglefield. The colonel had scarcely silenced his tongue, when a variety of dismal sounds broke out in his cabin; he threw down his knife and fork, listened a moment as if to make sure, and then crying out, "By George! I thought I couldn't be mistaken!" ran to his wife's berth.

As though bitten in the leg, Hornby sprang from his chair. He looked at Miss Edwards as if he would apologize for quitting the table, crammed his pocket-handkerchief into his mouth, and bolted on deck.

"It was the colonel's talk," I exclaimed, trying to look concerned; but the image of the little flying figure was too much for me, and I fell back laughing immoderately. "I am very uncharitable," said I, wiping my eyes, "but—but—" and off I started afresh.

My outburst was the best thing that could have happened; but for that, the hasty flight of Hornby, coupled with the sounds in Mrs. Inglefield's cabin, must, I think, have dismissed Miss Edwards from the table, if it had not obliged me to retire also. But my mirth proved contagious. Miss Edwards laughed heartily, abandoning after a few moments her efforts to look grave; and, seeing how the land lay, old Pipes tuned up his saw-like notes, so *that by the time we had recovered there was silence in the colonel's berth.* Presently he emerged and resumed his place.

"It turns out that it was my fault," said he, glaring round him for his plate, which the German under-steward had removed. "Mrs. Inglefield says that my conversation upset her. How the dickens, captain, could she hear me? Are your partitions there made of cardboard? Why, hang it," he roared, "one would suppose it was necessary to *scream* to make one's words hearable in my wife's berth. Hallo! what's become of Hornby?"

"I fancy that your conversation upset him too," said I.

"Upset *him*? Why," cried he, "what the deuce was there in what I said to—? tut! tut! he has no stomach. It's the motion of the ship that's done for him, not *my* conversation."

He fell to his dinner again, eating like an ogre. There could be no doubt that he had doubled the Cape several times.

If the proximity of my beautiful companion had disposed me to a somewhat sentimental mood, it was not easy to preserve that temper amidst this rushing in and out, the escape of Hornby, the shouts of the colonel, and the muffled moans of his wife. The cooking was good, the dishes numerous and excellent, and the wines of a quality one would expect at the hands of so hospitable and generous a liver as Edwards. Still that first dinner aboard the *Silver Sea* was scarcely a success. It was all gobble—gobble—with the colonel, intermingled with frequent listening for fresh alarms from his wife's cabin; Miss Edwards was clearly anxious for the meal to come to an end; the chief mate departed as he had entered without reference to us, and his place at the second table was taken by hairy Mr. Nicholas Semple; and Pipes talked and behaved as though he felt, now that Hornby was gone, he should not recover his ease and composure until he was on deck.

We did not, therefore, prolong our sitting, and the red of the sunset was still in the sky when we rose. Airy and elegant as the cabin was, I was not sorry to quit it. Until you are seasoned to the movements of a vessel the smell of food, the straining sounds of fastenings, the murmurs of sufferers, are prone to fill the mind with misgivings. I had laughed at little Hornby so cruelly that I did not want the tables to be turned, and though I was not in the least degree sensible of nausea, I nevertheless stepped on deck with alacrity, and was not a little comforted to find myself there.

CHAPTER IX.

A SMALL ALARM.

I FOUND the *Silver Sea* sailing in the midst of a beautiful ocean picture. The breeze had freshened considerably, and was blowing

"Don't mention eating, I beg you," he cried. "The wind is pretty fresh, isn't it? It seems to me to be blowing rather heavily.—Captain Pipes!" he called.

The old fellow came bowling over to us. He had clothed himself in a fur cap and a pea-coat, and was smoking a pipe which he deferentially buried in the hollow of his big hand. I liked this mariner's modest ways. There never was a more unobtrusive sailor.

"Isn't it blowing very strong, captain?" said Mr. Edwards.

"Lor' bless you, no, sir," answered Pipes, "just a steady, beautiful air, sir. Look aloft—nothing visible but the new moon fast disappearing. It's a breeze to make the most of; just the draught we want to blow us out of the Channel."

"A draught, do you call it?" exclaimed Hornby.

"Ay, a nice little draught, sir," answered Pipes. "If this wasn't the Channel, and our stun'sail booms were aloft, I'd give her half as much sail again as we're carrying.—Bear it?" he cried, as if anticipating the question, "God bless you, gentlemen, why, in smooth water like this, and with nothing but a summer draught blowing, the *Silver Sea* would carry twice the canvas of the old *Dook of Wellington* and not notice that she was being wafted along."

Nothing could be more reassuring; and on Mr. Hornby saying, "Oh, very well, Pipes, it's all right," the old fellow rolled away into the dusk of the weather quarter, where he stood smoking, whilst the dark figure of the officer of the watch patrolled the gangway.

The last of the sunset was gone; though the eye still seemed to find a kind of elusive tinge lingering over the western water. The night had drawn up dark though very clear; the stars twinkled with a keen blueness, as though the easting of the wind had cut facets on them; along the weltering black waters the pallid gleams of froth glimmered like blown wreaths of snow upon a vast and desolate moor; and the night-wind came with a shriek over the slanting weather bulwarks, and swept with a note of thunder into the great spaces of straining canvas, whose tacks and sheets groaned again as the leaning side of the swell rolling under the keel forced the great fabric of sail and spar to windward.

I don't say there was then too much wind for the main-royal; but, with all deference to Captain Pipes, it was something more than a draught of air. It was right abeam, the full weight of it was therefore felt, and the steep inclination of the ship accentuated its power. It was like looking at boiling milk to glance to leeward under the main sheet; you just saw a short length of the ink-black shrouds against it, betwixt the rail and the curved foot of the dark sail, with the stars which hung low down upon the sea slipping like *fireflies in and out of the murky squares of the ratlines as the ship*

rolled ; whilst up over the side whence the wind blew it was all slop, slop, and splutter, and hissing, as the beautifully moulded hull swept like a wet and gleaming shark through the dusky, glimmering tumble, and sent the breaking surges recoiling from her bows or frothing in a long moaning wash along her bends.

"This may be the month of June, Hornby," said Mr. Edwards, speaking slowly as though doubtful of the effects of energy ; "but whether it's my rheumatism or the want of the lining you get from the dinner-table, it strikes me as being cold enough for November. Aubyn, will you kindly ask the steward to bring me a big top-coat he'll find in my berth ?" Mr. Hornby made a similar request. "I daren't venture below yet," continued Mr. Edwards.

"Neither dare I," echoed Hornby.

The steward arrived with the coats, and I assisted Mr. Edwards to struggle into his. And a struggle it was. He was not only very stiff and very rheumatic and gouty : the heave of the ship kept him staggering, and he delivered groan after groan as he worked his arms into the sleeves, tumbling against me in a manner that had like to send us sprawling together to leeward. Hot brandy-and-water was now ordered as a solace ; the chairs were placed under the lee of one of the weather quarter boats, the keel of which, being level with the rail as the little craft hung at the davits in gripes, offered some shelter from the wind ; and here I lighted a pipe and surveyed with interest and admiration the phantom appearance of the ship sweeping through the gloom with the thunder of the wind in the scarcely visible concavities on high.

I had smoked out my pipe when, looking towards the companion, I spied a figure standing in it. It was Miss Edwards, and I at once went to her. The haze of the lamplight below came off the after skylight on to her, and there was just sufficient sheen to enable me to see her looking aloft and then from right to left, whilst with her ungloved hands she held on to the sides of the companion in a posture of uncertainty.

"Who is that ?" she inquired, trying to distinguish me. I answered. "How fearfully the ship lies over, Mr. Aubyn !" she exclaimed. "One doesn't notice it so much downstairs. And what a terrible noise there is up here !" with another lift of her eyes to the masts.

"There is a merry summer wind blowing," I replied, "and our friend Pipes is making the most of it. All the sail the *Silver Sea* carries is spread, and the breeze is using it as a drum."

"Is papa still on deck ?"

"There he is ;" and taking her hand I led her to him. She had been wise enough to throw a thick mantle over her shoulders ; in the fur round the neck of it nestled her face, and her turban hat—or toque, as I believe the ladies call it—made her look fit to encounter a gale of wind.

"Hallo, Margaret!" cried her father, "you'll find it cold here, my dear. You had better keep below, my love."

"If it's not too cold for you, papa," said she, "it's not too cold for me. Will this wind do your rheumatism good, do you believe?"

"If it don't make it better it can't make it much worse," he replied. "Hornby and I have been very sick, you know, and we're a little afraid of the cabin for the present."

"I must apologize to you, I am sure, for running away from the dinner-table, Miss Edwards," said the little man. "I'm not a good sailor, but I certainly am not a bad one; and all would have been well if it hadn't been for Colonel Inglefield and his talk of what he liked for breakfast, and all that sort of thing, don't you know!"

"I hope you feel better," said she.

"A thousand thanks—yes, a little better."

"I say, Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Edwards, "did Mr. Aubyn tell you I had lost my teeth?"

"No," she answered: "what do you mean?"

"I was not well enough to mention the accident when you saw me before dinner. Yes, they fell overboard, my dear; out of my mouth, Margaret. Twenty-five guineas plump, Hornby! Lucky I had another set or I should have had to put back or starve."

"A great nuisance, indeed," exclaimed Hornby, who had evidently been apprised of the circumstance, though he spoke as if he would have preferred any other subject to talk about.

Her father then went on to tell her how I had fetched the other set of teeth, the sympathy I had shown him, and so forth, all in a manner to let me see that he was much obliged. He then asked how Miss Inglefield did.

"She is getting on very well. I left her sleeping, which is a good sign. I am afraid her mamma is suffering. As I passed through the cabin I heard the colonel's voice—very loud, as usual—"

"A perfect gale of wind, a thunderstorm, and all that sort of thing, don't you know," interrupted Mr. Hornby warmly.

"He seemed to be reproaching her for not struggling with her feelings," continued Miss Edwards. "I heard him say, 'You yield too easily, Amy. You should clench your teeth, my dear, when you feel an attack coming on, and say to yourself—' but what she ought to say, I didn't hear," she added, breaking into a laugh.

"What a remedy for sea-sickness," cried I; "to clench your teeth!"

"That's what I should have done, and have saved twenty-five guineas," exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "It's just what a passionate man's recipe would be. I can figure the colonel feeling a qualm

and haranguing himself as if he were drilling a troop of imbecile Mussulmans."

"For my part," observed Hornby, "I think him incapable of qualms. I don't like to say disagreeable things of a person behind his back, but, with all respect to our military friend, Edwards, I cannot consider him a man of nice feelings."

"Oh, when we get over this preliminary business and come closer together, so to speak, Hornby, you'll find the colonel improve," exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "Margaret, you'll take cold if you remain standing."

"I enjoy the wind. How gloriously pure it tastes!" she answered. "It's rather dull downstairs, alone, papa."

"Will you take my arm for a few turns?" said I.

"Yes, walk about, walk about, Margaret," said her father. "It's too cold for you to stand."

On this she put her arm into mine and we fell to pacing the deck. It was too dark to see one another's face, though the starlight made the space of deck visible, and whenever we came abreast of one or the other of the skylights her eyes grew luminous in the haze. It was a great pleasure to me to have her company. Her likeness had made a deep impression on me, as I have confessed, and Heaven knows what sort of a man's heart I should have had in me had I been insensible to the beauty of the original, her noble figure, her wonderful dark eyes, the charming music of her voice, her ease and unconventionality. No, no, I was not insensible; I admired her with an enthusiasm that came very near to love at first sight, though I took good care not to own as much to myself lest my manner should betray me, for—and there is no harm in confessions of this kind in a story-book—I was one of the most sensitive wretches ever born, and had over and over again felt that if there was one thing more than another that would humiliate and put me out of conceit with myself, and annoy me for the remainder of my life, it would be to fall deeply in love with a woman and find myself rather disliked by her and coolly refused.

We talked of the Inglefields and Mr. Hornby, and the loss of her father's teeth, over which she now laughed heartily. Pipes lurked about the deck right aft, and seemed to be keeping a bright lookout along with the mate, who was forward of the skylights. The side lamps were in the screens, and from the mainmast to the eyes of the ship all lay black in the deep shadow cast by the slanting canvas. The roar of parted waters boiling over in coils came sweeping aft, mingled with the shrieking and wailing of the wind, splitting upon ropes and volleying out of the swollen sails. We'd now and then pause to look over the taffrail and watch the foaming water spinning out like a burst of steam into the further darkness till the creaming made the black water seem to stand up on either side of it as though the vessel were shooting through a liquid ravine.

The swell was strong, and the floating rushes of the ship over it filled her heart with creakings and complainings. Yet old Pipes gave no orders. To and fro he'd stump from the binnacle compass to where the quarter-boat hung, with sometimes a prolonged squint ahead and around over the side; and fast through the dusk we swept, under a sky of cloudless black blue crowded with greenish and steel-like stars, as though they were the eyes of all the angels of heaven watching us, and over a sea whose breast would scarce have been definable to the sight but for the glimmering whiteness that throbbled desolately among the ebony weltering.

"Is not Captain Pipes keeping a great deal of sail upon the ship?" asked Miss Edwards.

"Yes," I replied, "but not too much. He wants to give us what Mr. Hornby would call dispatch. He is an excellent seaman, I am sure. I have no doubt of his skill and judgment. Besides, he will be properly anxious to get clear of the Channel; and then look at the night, Miss Edwards. Positively not a cloud! it is a strong, clear breeze that may fail at any moment."

"You do not seem to notice the movement of the ship much," said she, clasping my arm for a bit of an extra lurch. "One would suppose that you are more used to the sea than you profess to be."

"No, I am the merest fresh-water sailor—not one atom better balanced for a rolling-deck than you, Miss Edwards."

"How very dark the night is!" pausing to stare first to right and then to left of her. "Are we near land?"

"I should say not, otherwise we should be seeing the Lizard light." But as I spoke my eye caught sight of a yellow point on the lee-bow; I had before noticed it, but thought it a star. "Is that the Lizard, captain?" I called to him.

"Ay, that's the Lizard right enough, Mr. Aubyn!"

"How far distant will it be?"

"Well, a matter of fifteen miles about."

"That answers your question, Miss Edwards," said I as we resumed our walk.

She watched the light continuously for some time, lost in thought which I would not intrude upon.

"The sight of that spark takes me back to my childhood," said she. "I had an aunt who lived at Penzance, and I sometimes stopped with her, and once she took me to the Lizard. Is not memory a wonderful thing, that that tiny yellow dot there can light it up with the brightness of daytime, and make a shining picture of it, so that I can see Mount's Bay and the tall cliffs that go round towards the Lizard, and quaint old Penzance with its long esplanade, and little Newlyn grouped white against the steep tracts of cultivated coast as plainly as if I were looking at the whole scene from St. Michael's Mount? Indeed if I were on the esplanade over there

I could not see everything more distinctly," speaking with her face turned towards the distant luminous beacon.

"It's the last glimpse of the old country we shall be able to snatch," said I. "If this pace holds, the coast will be many miles astern when the sun rises."

"Do you like the idea of the voyage?"

"Yes; but even if I did not I should not like to admit as much to myself now: it's a trifle too late to be in doubt."

"I am sure it will do my father good. He has tried so many different doctors, so many different remedies, and was growing disheartened and low-spirited; for what is more depressing than constant pain? I did not much care about the trip when it was suggested, but my father would not go without me, so I made up my mind to enjoy it for his sake."

"And you will enjoy it, I hope."

"If it does him good I shall. I like the ship and Captain Pipes; and is not Mr. Hornby a nice little man?"

"A very nice little man indeed."

"Miss Inglefield is also a very agreeable companion, and her father is sometimes very amusing. It is a pity, perhaps, that we are not fewer or more numerous. What do you think?"

"Well, we might be fewer," said I. "But I don't know about being more numerous. That would increase the risks."

"Yes," she answered, laughing, "but numbers would furnish us with refuges. There would be alternatives. Animals in a menagerie do not look unhappy, and I daresay are not so because there is variety, and variety means contentment. But if you were to lock up a poor dog with no other companions than a parrot and a monkey, would not melancholy sounds often be heard arising from his cage?"

"Who's the monkey?" said I.

"Oh, Mr. Aubyn, you know I am speaking in the most general sense in the world! But don't you think a few more people would have made the journey livelier than it promises to be?"

"I can't say. Even if they were very nice persons as the term runs, they might become bores after the first week. Shipboard is very destructive of human fascination. I mean it takes the edge off things so soon. On shore days pass without your seeing your friends, and their social and other attractions do not easily and quickly grow tiresome; but at sea people are locked up together, there are no breaks in the monotony of intercourse. There is the same face, the same talk, the same behaviour and all that sort of thing, don't you know," said I, imitating Hornby, "every hour of the waking day."

"How long do you think it will take us to grow tired of one another?"

"Haven't you begun already?" I exclaimed, pressing her hand

against my side as the sudden "hang" of the rushing ship warned me of what came—a long, yearning plunge with a thumping scattering of spray over the weather forecastle deck.

Whether she would have answered this question or not I don't know, but just as I spoke a loud shout sounding more like a yell than an exclamation came ringing aft from the look-out stationed forward: "There's a small sail right ahead, sir! hard a starboard, before we're over her!"

At any time a hoarse bawling of this kind raises a sort of alarm in one; but resounding as our look-out did from the thick dusk that enveloped the ship past the foremost skylight, and combining with the rushing and roaring sounds of the spurned and trampled waters, and the hissing and expiring seething noise of black surges combing down the weather side of the vessel, and the hooting and the thunder aloft, and the trembling and straining and plunging and leeward rolling of the heavily pressed and sharply leaning ship, it fell upon our ears like a blow, and brought us to a stand.

"I see it! I see it!" cried Pipes. "Hard a starboard!" he roared to the man at the wheel, and with the mate at his heels he sped as fast as his bowlegs would carry him to the helm. I hastily crossed the deck with Miss Edwards still on my arm, to look. We carried no cross-jack, and to leeward of the spanker the sea would be clear to the eye to where the boltrope of the mainsail curving upon the braced-up yard, from the earring to the sheet, came down abaft the lower main-rigging and shut out the view. I should not have imagined that the *Silver Sea* had so much way on her till I went to the lee-rail with Miss Edwards to see what had excited the forecastle yell. Rushing through it I knew she was by the heel of her, the tempestuous hurly-burly overhead and the screaming and snarling of water torn into foam. But when I got to leeward and looked over the side——

Phew! why, it was all whirling and blinding snow, with the ship almost on her beam ends ere responding to the first grinding down of her helm, crashing through it till the white froth, coming up with a dazzle from the darkness out of which it was churned, was almost within reach of my fist, and I found Miss Edwards holding on to my arm and pulling away from me, so to speak, as if in positive fear of the nearness of the mad boiling, whilst the yard-arms against the sky looked to be lying at an angle of forty-five degrees; though *then* you saw, by the sweep of the stars rounding away to your right in a wild dance out of the pitch-black spaces of the sails, how the frightened and snorting clipper was answering her helm; and casting a breathless glance aft I spied the mate helping the fellow at the wheel to harden it over to meet the flying vessel before she caught herself aback.

And then the cause of all this bother and commotion went by

like a phantom within pistol shot. She was a three-masted lugger, evidently a Frenchman from the lumpish appearance of the hull, lying-to under easy sail, with a lantern bobbing like a will-o'-the-wisp upon her quarter, the man who flourished it being invisible. We had been heading for her as neatly as the end of a piece of twine heads into a sailmaker's needle; and it took one's breath away to see her close to, within a stone's throw, swirling past at a rate that gave fearful assurance of what would have happened had we not sighted the dark and silent object in time. Her lantern would have been shown and waved minutes too late. She was away on the quarter a few moments after she had shot out of the darkness ahead, and lay rocking under the stars, a mere black smudge, with our white wake sluicing away towards her like our noble ship's scorning of the lubberly lumpish object she had nearly sent to the bottom.

"A narrow escape for both of us," said I. "*We* should have smashed her into staves, while *she* would probably have crushed our bows in for us, for those Frenchmen are as strongly built as a line-of-battle ship. Upon my word, Miss Edwards," I continued, with a squint up at the roaring canvas and then a peep at the maelström over the side, "our friend Pipes is——"

The rest of my exclamation was lost in a sudden cannonading forward that might have passed for several heavy batteries let fly in quick succession. "Steady!" roared the skipper, whilst the mate flew past us, shouting out at the top of his voice to know what was the matter. "Something carried away," said I, scrambling to windward and helping Miss Edwards along till we came to where her father and little Hornby stood steadying themselves by grappling each a belaying-pin, and both of them not a little scared.

"What on earth is the matter?" shouted Mr. Edwards.

Boom, boom! thrash, thrash! bang, bang! You heard the savage rattling of canvas heavily wind-swept, the resounding blows of huge blocks, the whipping of thick ropes accompanied by the incessant bawling of men.

"Get it hauled up, Mr. Bird! get it hauled up, sir!" bellowed Pipes. "Let go the fore-royal halliards! Man the flying jib down-haul!" and I saw the old chap scuttle over to the mizzen-royal halliards and let them go.

"For God's sake, what's the matter?" shouted Hornby. "Captain Pipes, I say, *what's* the matter?" putting his hand to his mouth and sending his voice flying with a sharp jerk of his head.

"Fore-sheet's carried away, sir; that's all," answered Pipes. "Nothing to take any notice of but the shindy, sir. The ship's showing a cloth or two more than she needs perhaps."

"What's the fore-sheet!" cried Mr. Edwards, asking the

question as if he were not sure whether it might be the keel or the rudder.

"The rope that holds down the lee corner of the fore-sail when set, sir!" replied Pipes.

"Were it a rock or a leak," shouted Edwards, "there couldn't be more noise. Heaven preserve us! one would think a tempest was raging. It's enough to set a man praying, Hornby!" he bawled, putting his mouth to the little man's ear.

The ship, rounding up to windward to go clear of the Frenchman, had for a few moments taken a somewhat leveller deck; but as she paid off again with her helm hard over, she received the full weight of the wind and lay down to it afresh in a manner that must doubtless have made the flogging and slatting of the fore-sail, the yawling of the men, and the wild sharp washing of the water sounds not a little alarming to inexperienced ears. However, after a bit the watch managed to get the fore-sail hauled up and quieted, and then they began to dance about the decks, clewing up the royals and hauling down the light stay-sails. In the midst of all this the colonel came rushing along out of the companion calling, "Edwards! Edwards!" at the top of his voice.

"Here I am," replied Mr. Edwards; "what's the matter?"

"What's the matter?" roared the colonel, making the decks on a sudden as noisy again with his needless bellowing. "That's just what *I* want to know. What *is* the matter? eh? eh? Is the ship in danger?" and he thrust his hairy face into ours, one after the other, to see who we were.

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Hornby, who, to judge from the firmer tone of voice, appeared to have benefited somewhat from the hurry and confusion of the moment. "We nearly ran into a small vessel that showed no lights, and whilst avoiding her a rope gave way and a sail began to flap, and all that sort of thing, don't you know! but there's no *danger*."

"Why, my wife thought we were sinking," cried the colonel. "If she wasn't so prostrated by sickness she'd have come on deck in her dressing-gown, by George! and there's not many women would do *that* unless they were in fear of being drowned. Why, what the deuce has Captain Pipes been doing with this ship? One moment she's lying over and then she gets upright, and then awayshe goes again—enough, by jingo! to bring the sweat out of a rhinoceros. And what the dickens is he doing now, I should like to know?" and dark as it was you might yet have made out the outline of him angrily posturising as he glared aloft and looked around the deck.

Hereupon Hornby called to the skipper, who showed no further disposition to relieve the ship of more canvas. The old fellow approached us.

"Pipes, Colonel Inglefield wants reassuring," said Mr. Edwards. "*Just ease our minds by telling us we're safe, will you?*"

"Safe!" cried Pipes. "Why, surely there's no gentleman or lady here as doubts *that*?"

"Ay, but what's been the meaning of the hullabaloo?" shouted the colonel. "It's all very fine for people like you, who are in it and know all about it, to wonder at a landsman's misgivings; but persons in their cabins who hear sails flapping, men shouting, and feel the ship altering her position every minute, are apt to receive sensations which are confoundedly unpleasant, Captain Pipes."

"The fore-sheet carried away," replied the captain, "and a bit of time was lost by the men having to dodge the clewgarnet blocks. There was a beast of a—beg pardon, Miss Edwards, I'm sure—there was a French smack in the road, sir, one of them craft that never *will* show a light, and the look-out reported her in good time. That's all, sir."

"But it seems to be blowing a gale of wind!" exclaimed the colonel; "and aren't you carrying a terrific quantity of sail, considering?"

"Considering what, sir?" demanded old Pipes.

"Why—why—why," shouted the other, "considering that it seems to be blowing a gale of wind."

"That's because you've just come into it. You feel the breeze after the calm of the cabin," remarked Hornby.

"Mr. Hornby," cried Captain Pipes, "this is no gale of wind, sir. It's just a pleasant draught of air. It'll be failing us presently, but whilst it lasts we're bound to use it," and he went away aft again.

"You're perfectly safe in Pipes's hands, colonel," said Mr. Edwards. "You may sleep as securely as if old Neptune had command of this ship."

"Oh, hang it all, Edwards, I don't doubt that, my dear fellow," answered the colonel. "It's my wife who's a trifle nervous. As for *me*, God bless you! I am too old a hand to be worried by the flapping of a sail or the angles described by a ship's decks. But I say—it won't do for the captain to call this a draught of air. Might as well describe a lifeguardsman as being of about Hornby's size. Eh, Hornby? Ha! ha!"

"Is Mrs. Inglefield no better?" asked Miss Edwards.

"Why, yes and no. She's been very sick, and though she's that no longer there's a touch of hysteria about her; a confounded fidgetiness and a disposition to scream. She sent me up to find out what the matter was, and I have no doubt is lying all this while expecting to see the water rush through the door as the ship settles. She has no nerves, Edwards, no nerves. But I say—have you and Hornby been sitting here since dinner?"

"Yes: and I am beginning to feel that a glass of hot brandy and water in the cabin *would* do me no injury," answered Edwards.

"Hornby, if you'll give me your arm I'll hand you below," shouted

the colonel. "Why, man, if you go on sitting here much longer you'll become like Lot's wife—frozen up. No, no! I don't mean that. Lot's wife became salt, confound it!"

On this there was a general move. Hornby, taking no notice of the colonel's offer of assistance, made his way alone sulkily to the companion; Miss Edwards took one of her papa's elbows while I held the other, and in this manner we left the deck, that certainly was beginning to feel bleak enough with the damp darkness and the pouring of the night wind over the bulwarks.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE CABIN.

THE cabin of the *Silver Sea* never looked more comfortable than at night when the lamplight was reflected in the bulkhead polish and in glass and white metal. Miss Edwards went to see how Miss Inglefield was, whilst the colonel entered his wife's berth, and the others and myself sat down at one of the tables. Now that I had a good view of Hornby, he seemed to me to have shrunk somewhat since dinner. Small as he was he yet looked smaller. Hot water and spirits were put upon the table, and Mr. Edwards and his little friend helped themselves with a certain eagerness, the meaning of which was plain enough in the disordered glances they cast around them as though, like people suffering from nervous depression, they were worried by the creaking and straining of bulk-heads and timbers.

Before long Miss Edwards joined us, then Colonel Inglefield came out of his berth, and Captain Pipes entering, took his chair at the head of the table and mixed himself a tumbler of steaming grog.

"This is the right sort of picture to make," said I, pleased with the cheerful luminous interior. "Another day or two and we shall wear, let us hope, the true aspect of a jolly pleasure-party in pursuit of health."

"Very gracefully expressed, Aubyn," said Mr. Edwards with an ashen smile. "Margaret, how's Agnes?"

"Better, papa."

"Yes—much better," cried the colonel: "took a peep at her just now and think she'll be all right by the morning. My wife's easier too, I'm happy to say. She wants to get to sleep, Edwards, and so you'll excuse me if I suggest that we should keep our voices lowered," said he in the notes of a boatswain calling all hands in a gale of wind.

Old Pipes's face shining like a rising moon through the vapour

that rose from his glass, here took an expression that caused me to burst into a laugh.

"What's the joke, Mr. Aubyn?" exclaimed little Hornby, whose nausea rendered him sensitive.

"Nothing—nothing," I replied. "Mere exuberance of animal spirits induced by the sea-air. Captain, isn't the wind failing?"

"Yes, sir," he answered. "You don't want to look at those swinging trays to feel it. I never reckoned it would last."

"So much for your gale, colonel," exclaimed Mr. Edwards.

"Pooh, pooh! I was joking, man," cried the colonel. "Gale! I don't know how long our friend the skipper there has been to sea, but I wouldn't mind laying him an even bet that I have seen as much bad weather as he has. One hurricane I was in, in the Bay of Bengal, was so fearful that it might easily have been spread over five years and made every day a storm."

"Ay," observed Pipes gravely, "you get some busters and no mistake in the Bay of Bengal. I knew a shipmaster that was out in a squall there, and he said it not only blew his whiskers off and carried his eyebrows clean away from his forehead, but it so knotted his hair that he never afterwards could make a parting in it; whilst it slewed the bo'sun's head round on his neck in such a fashion that for the rest of the voyage an ordinary seaman was told off to do nothing else but feed him and put the whistle into his mouth when it was needful for him to blow. Can't say, I'm sure, if that shipmaster was joking or not."

"What are you drinking, Hornby?" exclaimed the colonel, who seemed to find nothing very funny in this story.

"Brandy," said the little fellow, looking sulky and sick.

"I'll take some. Is smoking allowed here, Hornby?"

"That's for the ladies to say."

Miss Edwards said that she had no objection; on which the colonel exclaimed that he could answer for his wife and daughter, and forthwith produced a case of manilla cheroots. I was not unthankful for this stroke on his part. As a confirmed smoker, I felt it would be a poor look out if I should have to 'sneak on deck' every time I wanted to light a pipe or cigar.

Remembering what befell us afterwards, I never recall the scene of the cabin that night without something betwixt a smile and a sigh. The lamps which swung overhead were large and brilliant: they streamed fair down on Pipes's wide face and gleamed in his thickly-greased hair as though it were formed of Britannia metal; on Mr. Edwards large and pale, toying with his tumbler, and apparently self-engrossed; on little Hornby grey, restless and surly, incessantly sipping at his glass, and running his eye from one to another's face as though suspicious of our thoughts, pausing when he came to Miss Edwards to take a long sentimental look that *would be sometimes disturbed by a qualm which brought his hand*

in a hurry to his waistcoat ; on the colonel's hairy face with tobacco smoke breaking out through his thick moustache as if it were on fire ; and on the beauty of Margaret Edwards, never more beautiful than in lamplight, when the warmth of her colour was softened and the black of her eyes took a more melting tinge and their light a sharper sparkle, and when her thick and crowning hair looked the richer for being as lustreless as the shadow of a night moonless and without stars. Overhead the black spaces of the skylights gave back the interior picture dark and distinct with a few yellow orbs floating like golden seeds blown upon the air to and fro amid the reflection. The heel of the ship was appreciably diminishing ; yet there was still wind enough abroad to keep the blackness outside humming, and the rolling of the ship was accentuated by the sound of falling water, as the surges losing their strength leapt and dropt futilely against the glass-like sides of the vessel.

"I feel," said Mr. Edwards, filling another glass, "as if I ought to go to bed. But I perfectly dread being smothered up in my berth."

"A little patience, sir," remarked Pipes. "It's nothing but movement that'll dislodge the gout. Mark my words, Mr. Edwards ; a good gale of wind, sir—something in the colonel's line—and your gout'll fly overboard, dead and buried there."

"There's only one cure for rheumatism," exclaimed the colonel in his loud, cock-sure manner.

"Indeed !" said I, "and what may that be ?"

"Whisky and sulphur," he shouted. "Finest thing in the world, sir. Would drive the disease out of a man of ninety."

"Papa has tried sulphur," said Miss Edwards. "It did him no good."

"Finest thing in the world, I say, Miss Edwards," continued the colonel. "The only *real* remedy in existence. I suppose you know what rheumatism is ?" swigging off half a tumbler of grog and wiping down his moustache with his handkerchief like a fellow cleaning a horse.

"I have heard, but I really forget."

Edwards listened with interest. Hornby mixed himself a fresh tumbler of brandy with an abstracted air and a woe-begone face.

"Well, it's an insect," said the colonel.

"A what, sir ?" shouted Pipes.

"An insect," exclaimed the colonel.

"God bless me !" cried Pipes.

"There's no doubt of it," continued the colonel. "A native doctor told me he had seen the parasite. It lodges in the tissues and produces inflammation. I'd rather not *argue* the question, because, you see, I'm quite certain I'm right ;" and he called to the steward for a light for his cigar.

"*I can't say I ever heard that before,*" said Mr. Edwards.

"Nor I," mumbled little Hornby. "What sort of insect? caterpillar with twelve legs and all that sort of thing?" and here methought he smiled rather foolishly at Miss Edwards.

"If rheumatics is an insect," remarked Pipes, possibly emboldened by the incredulity of the owner of the *Silver Sea*, "how does he get inside a man's arm?"

"That's a medical question," answered the colonel; "but being an insect, the one thing to kill it is sulphur, don't you see? I'll give you a case, Edwards: a friend of mine, General Gunner, was so bad with rheumatism that he couldn't bend his right arm, couldn't pick up anything with his left hand, could only walk by sweeping his right leg along, which produced endless street-rows as, by George! people whom he kicked by accident would come up and threaten him with the police; it seized the optic nerve, sir, and blinded one eye; it tightened all the muscles about his jaws, and for days he'd go about gaping; he couldn't wear a boot, couldn't draw on a glove, and, by jingo! he was fit for very little more than a bath chair. I recommended sulphur. He sneered. I said, 'Try it and *then* sneer.' He did try it: one by one the insects which caused his agony expired, within three months he was well enough to take exercise on horseback; and hang me, Hornby, if within eight months of beginning sulphur, hang me, I say, if he hadn't proposed marriage to a widow!"

"Poor woman!" said Hornby imbecilely. I noticed that he sipped more frequently than the empty condition of his stomach should have warranted.

"If swallowing enough sulphur to furnish forth a match-factory should cure rheumatism, I ought to be well by this time; eh, Margaret?" exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "However, there may be different forms of the malady, colonel; and when it is caused by insects, sulphur, no doubt, *is* a cure."

"Don't believe it," grumbled little Hornby. "Insects all nonsense. Tell you what it is, colonel; native doctor made a d——d fool of you."

The colonel pulled the cigar from his mouth and looked with amazement at the little man, whose watery eyes and inflamed countenance wore a most defiant and aggressive expression. Pipes seemed scared, Miss Edwards unconcerned, and her father as if he could enjoy the scene more were the ship to stop rolling.

"Rather a curious remark to make, Hornby," cried the colonel. "Won't repeat it, you know, in the presence of a lady! but, by George! I'm not at all sure it don't look as if an apology must follow it."

"Apology!" exclaimed Hornby, with a rather drunken flourish of his hand. "Pooh, pooh! apologize because a native doctor talked rubbish to you about insects and all that sort of thing, don't you know? If I owe *anybody* an apology, it's Miss Edwarsh. Miss Edwarsh, beg your pardon, I'm sure, for ushing strong'spression."

Insects, you know—great nonsense.” He gave her an inebriated bow, and emptying his tumbler, mutely pointed to the decanter of brandy, which Pipes at once passed down to him.

The colonel, who had been steadfastly watching the little man, now saw how it was, and with good sense took no further notice, and went on smoking his cigar. We all understood that Hornby was the victim of circumstances, that he drank to relieve his nausea, and that probably less than his usual dose had affected his head through his having fasted since lunch. But he had taken more than enough already; and Mr. Edwards, seeing him about to mix himself another strong draught, exclaimed, “Hornby, we’re neither of us right yet. The creaking and movement down here keep me very uneasy. Shall we go to bed, my friend? we may wake up perfect sea-dogs in the morning.”

“Don’t shtay up for me, Edwarsh,” answered Hornby, addressing the bulkhead to the right of the old fellow. “You look shleepy. I feel better. Nothing like brandy for shickness. Miss Edwarsh, you’re not drinking. Lemme mix you a glash grog?” and he made with a wandering hand for the decanter.

But half a glass of claret and a sweet biscuit had sufficed her; she declined his politeness with a well-bred smile that must have satisfied the little fellow, if he was not too drunk to appreciate her manner, that she saw nothing at all unusual in his behaviour. She then rose, kissed her father, wished us good-night, and withdrew to her cabin. Hornby seeing us rise, got up too. Fortunately the chairs were fixtures, and his own that he hung on to prevented him from falling down; but like the others it revolved, and I heard something very closely resembling a laugh come from the direction of Miss Edwards, as she stood a moment at her cabin door looking our way, when a roll of the ship caused the little fellow to swing round his chair as if he were a small boy amusing himself in that way.

“Where are you going, Pipshe?” said he to the skipper who was moving off.

“On deck to have a look round.”

“Quite right,” said he, speaking with drunken gravity. “Keep on looking round, Pipshe; keep us out of danger. Don’t want any collisions and all that sort of thing, don’t you know. Misser Aubyn, your good health; glad to shee you on board my ship. Nishe vessel—pash the water, pleash; didn’t know this wash neat;” he exclaimed, after putting his lips to the brandy he had forgotten to dilute.

“I say, steward,” shouted the colonel; “what time do you put out the lights, hey?”

“Not till everybody’s retired, sir,” answered the man.

“Oh, but hang it all,” cried the colonel; “that’s not proper ship-routine, is it, Edwards? Ought not the lights to be put out at a

fixed hour, and one of the vessel's officers go round and see all safe, hey? Why, by George! if that's not done, who's to tell me the ship may not be set on fire?"

"Never mind," stuttered Hornby, stroking the air; "I'm mashter here, I and Edwarsh. No fear of fire. You're too nervous, colonel."

"It would be rather inhospitable to enforce the ordinary ship's discipline in a pleasure-trip of this kind," exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "The steward will see to the cabin lamps and," added he significantly, "to any other lights which may need attention."

"It'll be all right, sir," said the steward.

The colonel looked gloomily at the man, but made no remark.

"Hornby," continued Mr. Edwards, "I'm off. Let me persuade you to go to bed. You want rest."

But the little fellow had arrived at that degree of intoxication when every suggestion affected him as an insult. "I'm all right, I tell you," he exclaimed warmly, looking at Mr. Edwards with wandering eyes. "I'm not shleepy. I'm going to shmoke a cigar. What do you want to go to bed for? It isn't late. Edwarsh, remember fine ole shong—Besh of all ways to lengthen your daysh, shteal a few hours from the night, my dear."

His maudlin was not pleasant, yet in so small a man it was extremely ridiculous. For the life of me, I could not help laughing at his face, as he recited the above rhymes, keeping time by nodding his head at Edwards over his tumbler; whereupon he laughed uproariously too. You naturally saw that he was the last man in the world to indulge in this way; that it had been forced upon him by nausea, and the anxiety to bear up and comport himself like a seafarer in the presence of Miss Edwards; and I say that though I laughed at him, I was sorry too, and heartily wished, for the sake of his dignity, that he would go to bed.

Mr. Edwards, probably hoping that if he withdrew Hornby would follow him, struggled up out of his chair amid several groans which made me fear he was going to be ill again, and bidding us all good-night, retired to his cabin leaning on the steward's shoulder. Meanwhile, inch by inch, the swinging trays were recovering their perpendicular, the humming sound without was sobering, and there was an increasing feeling of helplessness in the rolling of the ship that denoted the failure of the steadying and driving power of the breeze. I was not yet sleepy; and that being so, I had no mind to immure myself in my berth and lie awake for three or four hours perhaps. I therefore refilled my pipe whilst the colonel gazed with a troubled face at Hornby, who sat with a sort of squint in his damp eyes smiling foolishly at one of the lamps, having apparently forgotten to light the cigar he had promised himself.

For the sake of saying something, I asked the colonel how long it was since he had left India.

"When I left the service?" he shouted; "eight years ago."

"I meet a great number of retired Indian officers in society and elsewhere," said I; "men who have given up, or been given up by, the army. To judge from them the profession of arms seems a poor look-out. Many of them are necessitous, and it does not speak highly for your old calling, colonel, that one shall seldom encounter a retired military man who is not hunting about for something to do—for occupation's sake no doubt, and also perhaps for income."

"You're right," cried the colonel. "Soldiering *is* a poor look-out. Here am I, sir, with eight and twenty years of service, reduced at the age of sixty to this—that if my wife was without means we should not be able to pay more than thirty pounds a year rent for a house."

"Miserable calling," muttered Hornby. "Nothing like commersh."

"My contention," continued the colonel, talking with excitement, "is that the Government have no right to starve men like me—men who have attained to rank in their calling by long service—by giving half-pay to chits of lieutenants, who are shoved into the army by their friends because it's genteel, find they don't like it, betake themselves to beer and brandy, and retire in the name of ill-health because they won't keep sober. England's full of these mushrooms, Mr. Aubyn, and of twopenny naval creatures, sir, who draw pay enough in the aggregate to render old stagers like me comparatively opulent were their money withheld and added to what we receive."

"I have very little knowledge of military or naval usage," said I mildly, in mitigation of his heat.

"I know shomething about it," remarked Hornby, holding on to the table whilst he leaned towards us. "What I shay is, what right's any one got to draw pay when he does nothing for it? When a man's sherving, all right; when he gives up, shtop his wages. That'sh my argument. It comshe out of my pocket. Why should I pay taxes, and all that sort of thing, donyerknow, to sh'port a man because the army don' wan' him?"

"It should gratify military men, colonel," said I, thinking it best to appear not to hear Hornby, "to observe the high esteem in which civilians hold army titles. Nearly every other man I meet is colonel or major or captain nowadays. The Yankees set us this fashion, I imagine. In America they have generals of hotels and colonels of dry goods stores. If a man gets money in this country and cannot obtain a knighthood, or anything distinctive in that way, he becomes a volunteer dignitary. I can assure you I once knew a Major Shamrock, and always supposed, from his *military talk and martial appearance*, that he was in the regular service and had seen some fighting. Yet he turned out to be

secretary to a gas company and a militiaman, and when I asked him what a staff officer was, he answered that it depended upon circumstances."

The colonel's face was full of scorn for Mark Lane captains and gas company majors, and he was going to speak when a cry of "Charley, Charley!" from his cabin stopped him, and in an instant he jumped up and vanished. Upon my word I believe, after all, that military men make the best husbands. I have known scarred and hairy officers to hold their babies, tramp off for medicines, fetch and carry, act as housemaids and monthly nurses, look after the children, and do a score of things which a civilian would scornfully decline.

"Very troublesome pershon, Misshus Inglefield," said Hornby, trying to balance his head, which drooped first on one shoulder then on the other, like that of a broken doll. "Always calling out. Shouldn't like to be her hushband."

He was not in a condition to talk, and as I wanted some air and a few turns before going to bed, I got up, directing a significant look at the little chap for the edification of the steward, who flitted about the mizzen-mast yawning and waiting for us to turn in.

"Where are y'r going, Aubyn?" asked Hornby.

"On deck," said I.

"I'll go too," he exclaimed, and rose from his chair, holding on to it, whilst in the most stupid imaginable manner he glanced about for his hat. It was not for me to deny the little gentleman the use of his own ship, nor could I be sure that my advising him to go to bed would not lead to unpleasantness. Much to my relief, however, he let go his chair to fetch his hat and fell down, and lay without attempting to rise. The steward and I picked him up, but found that his legs twisted about under him as though formed of whalebone; so we carried him very easily to his cabin, he meanwhile endeavouring to make me understand that Margaret Edwards was the finest woman in the world; and then, placing him in his bunk, I left him to the care of the steward, who said that he thought it would be enough for the present if he removed the little man's shirt-collar and pulled off his boots.

There was nothing in all this to discompose me, to cause me to conclude that scenes of this kind were likely to be repeated. Indeed, any one looking at Hornby would have known him for a temperate man by the dry, brisk aspect of his face, his clear eye, and bird-like activity. The remedy of brandy was undignified, no doubt; yet it had certainly stayed further sickness in him, and now in all probability he would sleep through the night and wake up, with a headache very likely, but free from nausea. I told the steward to dim the cabin lamps and not stop up for me, and went on deck to take a look round and court from the air the drowsiness I felt I should need before going to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

HORNBY'S BLUNDER.

THE wind had fallen into a soft sailing breeze ; its edge of cold had vanished with its strength, and the temperature was delightful. The cloudless indigo was thick with stars ; you saw the dust of them silvering the heights beyond the planets and the brighter orbs, till the sense of dusk-laden space, the immeasurable remoteness of the mighty shadowed hollow, grew overwhelming, and for very relief the eye turned to what was near and familiar. The light canvas that had been taken in was again set, and the *Silver Sea*, under a cloud of glimmering white, was quietly sailing upon the dark ocean, taking the swell with a motion that was like a respiration of her, whilst every swing in of the canvas shed a pattering of dewdrops down upon the decks.

It was a night to make a man in love with solitude. The silence was broken by occasional creaking or grating sounds, by the jerk of the wheel chains, by now and again a harsher gurgling of water about the rudder-post, or a splashing fall forward when the leap of a little surge struck the bend of the bow as the cutwater sank into the swell and was sent sharply recoiling. There were twenty things to look at : the dance of a greenish star over the main royal mast-head ; the glimmer of steel-white orbs among the rigging and between the sails ; a sulky flash of foam to leeward when the back of a black swell rolled on and left its froth streaming down into the hollow ; the swift swaying and fanning of dim spaces in the air till the faint glittering seemed to be sweeping around the ship ; the motionless figure at the wheel with the stars sliding up and down past him ; and then the misty arching of the foot of the mainsail and of other canvas as high up as the eye could follow, that gave a sort of yearning look to the phantasmal vessel, as if her pale and lonely heart were swelling out to some object on the deep to leeward of her course ; and a moving shape or two on the forecastle head, with a red point here and there in the shadow about the galley, marking the whereabouts of a man sucking at a pipe of tobacco.

I stood for some moments in the companion taking all this in, wondering that darkness and starlight should give the unreality I found to such a prosaic thing, for instance, as the mizzen-mast there, with its dim top and faint tracery of rigging, and the topgallant-mast melting into vagueness ere it could carry the eye to the tiny royal that was rendered visible only by the stars it blotted out as it was swayed up there like an unballasted kite ; and peering along the deck to make out which of the two *figures standing near the foremost quarter-boat was Moses Pipes, when my glance going beyond them fell upon a great pallid*

shadow upon the sea about half a mile away from us, with a faint green light of a palpitating wan lustre, like a cat's eye viewed in darkness, shining upon her bow. There stood a telescope on brackets under the companion, and directing it at the object, I made it out to be a long, four-masted sailing ship, very deep in the water, with chequered sides, probably three times our size, and resembling an island out there snow-clad from peak to base.

"Is that you, Captain Pipes?" said I.

"Ay, sir," he responded. "Fine night, Mr. Aubyn. I suppose now the colonel wouldn't laugh at me for calling *this* a draught of air?"

"That's a lumping big craft out yonder," said I.

"The biggest sailing ship I have ever seen," observed Pipes's companion, who proved to be the chief mate, turning to peer at her again. "She's going past us like a roll of smoke, too."

"Yes, but look at the canvas she carries," growled Pipes. "'Tis enough to choke off every breathing from us. Give me a topgallant breeze, Mr. Aubyn, the wind two points free, and I'd warrant the *Silver Sea* to tow that ship there."

She was making a more westerly course than we, going along with the weather clew of her mainsail hauled up, but apparently with every stitch of plain canvas belonging to her spread; and it looked as if she meant to cross our bows. As she was sailing two feet to our one, there was no great risk in her doing that, though I do not suppose Pipes much relished the manœuvre, as there was something not a little disdainful in it. For my part, all that I took notice of was the beautiful, mysterious sea-vision she made. Having four masts with double topsails and double topgallant-sails on each and royal staysails and skysails, the curved stretches of canvas which she inclined towards us seemed to fill half the leeward sky. You saw her steam-coloured wake breaking out from under the pitchy blackness of her counter and sluicing off upon the throbbing darkness astern. She was steady as a rock; I watched the stars stream along her yards and past her straight, like jewels on a thread. I strained my ear for any sound, but though she closed us as she drew ahead, all was as silent her way as if she had been the Phantom Ship manned by spectres.

The vastness and the sublimity of the ocean at night are never more solemn and stirring than when you measure the mighty darkling surface by the standard of such a ship as I was watching. You can realize *her* size, the immense length of deck she would offer to your gaze were you to take your stand on her traffrail and look forward, the height her masts reach up to; and now mark what a toy she is yonder, how the infinity of the weltering dusky leagues she is sailing in the midst of overwhelm her, till presently, though well *this side the junction of sky and water*, she is the

merest film, the shadow of a shadow, eluding your intent stare and symbolizing life—the immateriality of our proudest creations, the littleness of our greatest things, the decay and effacement wrought by darkness (which you may liken to death) brooding over the glooming ocean (which you may compare to eternity)—as nothing else in nature can. One wanted some kindred soul to exchange fancies with over such a picture as that ship was there, drawing ahead and dying out in the airy flow of darkness till the pallor of her sails was merged into the starlight, and she was gone to the eye; and I could have wished for the companionship of Miss Edwards instead of that of Pipes and his professional-minded mate.

"Well," says the skipper, "praise the Lord, I have no knowledge of four masts. Three I hope will serve my turn in this blessed world. And yet they say that those four-masted concerns are handier than vessels of this pattern, though any man as can convince me of *that* shall force me to swallow my boots."

"They're readier in stays, I believe," exclaimed the mate.

"Yes, and I daresay a fifth mast would make them readier yet, and a sixth mast so smart that they'd need no handling," said Pipes with much contempt in his voice. "Tell ye what it is, Mr. Aubyn: the age is getting a sight too knowing in ship-building. The learning and notions of our ancestors are despised; we're constructing marine objects which fifty years ago would have caused their inventors to be locked up in lunatic asylums—vessels which in my young days you'd have no more got an able seaman to ship aboard of than you'd have induced him to sign articles for the engine-room. What's the consequence? Millions of pounds' worth of property are every year being sent to the bottom, and the ocean's full of the bodies of seafaring persons washing about. This is the penalty we pay for forgetting of the wisdom of our forefathers. The length is ten times the beam now, you know, sir; cement's taken the place of hearty honest oakum; iron—brittle as glass—of good salted timber; and everything that lifts and histes and pumps and revolves is some duffing landsman's patent, so confoundly clever that if a pin breaks, or a screw drops out, or a pipe gets choked, sailormen are left at the marcy of Davy Jones."

He expectorated with great violence in token of the emotion of disgust that had taken possession of him, and then with a noisy snuffle took a look round the sea.

"You're a regular old Conservative, I see, Captain Pipes," said I.

"To the backbone, sir," he answered; "from the loftiest hair atop of my head down to the largest nail-top on the heel of my boot. I believe in the Queen and the British Constitution, Mr. Aubyn; I believe in live oak and good workmanship, in beam enough to *give a ship something to lean upon*, in the House of Lords and the

opinions of the Duke of Wellington, passed and old as they now be. I'm not ashamed of my principles, sir. If you're a Radical, I'm quite willing to respect your opinions, but a Tory I am and a Tory I mean to die, as my father did afore me, and as his father did afore *him*."

"Well, captain," said I, "in my opinion politics are like religion—a subject never to be broached in polite society. What's the weather going to be, do you reckon?"

"Nothing to hinder it keeping fine, sir. Has Mr. Hornby turned in, d'ye know?"

"I left him in his cabin in the care of the steward," I replied. "He should be turned in and snoring by this time."

"Well, Mr. Bird," said he, addressing the mate, "I think I'll go and lay down for a couple of hours;" and after giving him some directions, he took another look round, cast his eyes aloft, bade me good-night, walked to the binnacle and peered into it, and then slowly went below.

I exchanged a few sentences with the mate, and presently left him to take a turn round the ship for the love of the seclusion her dark and quiet decks offered. I found a kind of melancholy pleasure in renewing my old seafaring memories, brief as they had been. There was a peculiar fascination to me in the gentle lonesome plaining of the wind, that was now a quiet breeze, in the rigging, in the soft sound of frothing water, and in the spectacle of the dark ungleaming ocean embracing our spectral ship that was quietly sailing in the middle of the visionary circle. Intellectual happiness so great as that which I could find in a half-hour's contemplation of the glooming scene around me I was never likely to obtain ashore. Nor, indeed, could any vessel but a sailing ship have inspired it. For in a steamer, the perpetual champing of the engines and the ceaseless rushing of the impelled hull are a constant reminder of active and warring life; the ruddy bulls-eyes which cause one to think of the vessel as full of fire, the scarlet glare breaking out ever and anon in the depths of the engine-room like a gleam of sunset, and the numerous harsh sounds of labouring steam and of toiling men below, render the sense of isolation and solitude difficult if not impossible. But, on such a night as this I am describing, in a sailing ship, urged by a gentle air over the black swell that makes a rocking cradle of the deep, when there is no life visible save the figure of the man at the wheel, the officer of the watch leaning against the rail, the look-out man on the fore-castle; and no sound save the tender stirring of canvas like the silken brushing of pinions, and the delicate seething of foam lightly turned and expiring quickly; the soul, if it will, may truly feel alone. The meteor that flashes and fades lifts the sky and the stars away from you and makes the remoteness of the firmament *greater still; the deep is a vague presence, and the mind loses*

perception of it as a portion of this terrestrial globe in the immensity of the wondrous shadow ; the voices of the wind whispering among the shrouds, and the mystery with which darkness dowers the familiar fabric, abstract all reality from the ship and leave her an idealism to your musing humour ; and hence follows in you, oh lonely watcher, a feeling of isolation so supreme that were you verily the last man left by Almighty God upon this earth, your solitude—deeply pleasurable, since it is not desertion nor enforced loneliness—could not be more thrilling as you stand amid the shadows and the mutterings and hearken to the faint creaming sounds of the ocean night, and look forth into the distance that would be a void as profound as that which reigned before the heavens and the earth were created, but for the stars and the few dim streaks of foam here and there rising and sinking under them.

It renewed old times in me to go forward under the arching foot of the foresail, past the black windlass end to the forecastle. It was as if the road to my proper lodging lay through the scuttle there, the square of which was tinged with a faint yellow from the lamp that swung below. There were two of the watch on the lookout, mirky, well-swathed figures, stepping lightly ; they took no notice of me. I had also observed here and there as I went along a figure reclining or squatting in the lee of anything, nodding drowsily, but ready, of course, to jump to the first shout. I went into the eyes of the ship and stood there, lost in contemplation of the dim scene. The picture was reversed now : the great glimmering fabric was floating *towards* me ; the long pale decks looked for ever to be shaping themselves out of the sternwards gloom into the symmetry of the hull, and the perception of this fantastic process of creation was helped almost startlingly whenever the bows of the ship sank into the hollows and slanted up the waist and main and quarter-decks into the faint sheen of the starlight, so as to make the planking visible to a long distance aft and coming down like a gentle slope of land towards me. I can tell you I was in a place to dream in. Eleven o'clock was struck on a bell hung just abaft the mainmast, and you heard the six musical chimes floating up among the sails and echoing, wherever there was a hollow, in a second or two's trembling. Far up the little fore-royal hung like a square of mist, and you almost fancied you saw the stars through it, and that it was vapour indeed, so subtly did the luminaries deceive the eye as they swung along the yard, or flashed out from the sides of the sail as the movements of the ship vibrated the masts.

I turned to look over the bow—an old boyish pleasure of mine ; for never was I weary of watching the cutwater shearing through *the green transparency*, and noting how, whatever came in the *vessel's way*—the long stretch of seaweed, the bit of green timber,

the sodden box or bobbing bottle—was spurned by the bow and sent rolling in the clear curve of the wave turned over by the stem to drown among the foam that ran away astern. Under the bow of the *Silver Sea* all was as black as pitch ; the long bowsprit and jibbooms, with the jibs curving one beyond another into the darkness ahead, deepened the shadow of the night there ; and though perhaps a few fathoms beyond, my eyes would now and again catch the gleam of a star's reflection held for a breathless moment in some smooth spot on the curve of a running fold of water, right under me it was like looking into a well. Perhaps, indeed, for a time not longer than a single beat of the heart, I'd see a confused pallid vagueness, and indistinct and ghostly configuration, so thin, so airy, so undeterminable, that my brain would refuse credence to the report of my sight ; maybe it was the cloudy working of froth under the surface which in phosphorescent latitudes would have shown a sparkling swarming green ; but whatever it was, real or imagined, it made the blackness I overhung, and which the stoop of the bows would sometimes bring me close to, strangely mysterious in its way ; what with the windy moaning you heard about and the kind of shiver that would sometimes run through the canvas till the throb of it seemed to die out up among the stars, and the sobbing drowning noises the water made as it was rent by the gently-pushing stem, as if, so help me heaven ! those misty scarce determinable outlines in the liquid ebony under the figurehead were perishing seamen rising yet again to the surface to utter a strangling cry to the deaf night.

But such fancies as these were best let alone on the eve of turning in, though it was with a reluctant hand that I knocked the ashes out of my pipe, and with reluctant legs that I made my way aft. For, you see, it was years and years since I had tasted this kind of enjoyment ; and being a lover of solitude and silence and the sea, why, the freshness of the delight of this first peaceful star-lighted ocean night put a sort of passion of imagination into me, and I could have lingered for hours, letting fancy after fancy float up and away as you see soap-bubbles break from the pipe in a boy's mouth. But this would not do. I was a guest, and must not be erratic, any how ; if old Pipes should come on deck and find me mooning about, he might draw conclusions unfavourable to my intelligence ; so calling out good-night to Mr. Bird as I passed him, I dived below, entered my berth, and went to bed.

It takes a man a night or two to get used to the creaking and jarring of his bedroom aboard ship. In these days of iron, passengers have but a very imperfect idea of the notes delivered by wooden beams and stanchions, bulkheads and planking, and timber held together by bolts and trenails. The *Silver Sea* was about as noisy a ship in this way as I can imagine. What she would have

been with a hold full of dead weight rising flush with the hatches, it is only possible to conjecture. Here we were, sailing in the midst of a lovely summer night, gently leaning before the breeze that had softened down into a mild breathing, and sliding quietly over the swell that, though defined enough, had lost much of its volume and velocity; yet, though by this time I was pretty sleepy, I was kept awake until three bells in the middle watch, namely, until half-past one o'clock, by the scores of queer sounds, the squeaks, snappings, groans, rusty jarrings, and gurgling, and garglings and the like which every heave of the ship dragged out of the fabric of my berth and the cabin outside, as though a cartload of animals of all sorts were being tormented.

Among these sounds I took notice of a very powerful and long-drawn snoring. I was pretty sure it could not proceed from a cabin so distant from mine as Mr. Edwards's; no young ladies could possibly be guilty of it, and Hornby had not the lungs to produce a sound so enormous. The cabin on my left was the pantry, and so no one slept in it; the cause of the windy clamour was not to be found there. Consequently I could not doubt that the snorer was Colonel Inglefield, who with his wife slept in the berth adjoining mine on the right. I never heard such snoring in my life. Indeed it was less *that* than snorting. It was as though our military friend was suffering from a heavy onslaught of nightmares, every one of which forced him to vary his uproar, though none allowed him to hush his notes for a moment. Hearing him was like listening to the champing of an engine labouring under an increasing pressure of steam. Gradually would the snorting work itself up, throat and nose blowing away like rival German bands, while periodically a long shrill whistling would strike in, till the throat gave way with a hoarse rattle, followed by a long triumphant plank-piercing trumpeting from the nose; whereupon the sleeper, changing the key, would begin again. How on earth his wife had endured for years such a bedroom companion as this colonel, I have hopelessly attempted to imagine.

But shortly after three bells had been struck, I fell asleep, and was slumbering very profoundly, as a man will who, being rendered drowsy by the rich, clear winds of the ocean, is rocked to sleep upon the heaving bosom of her, when I was aroused by the noise of a woman shrieking, accompanied by the shouts of a male voice. I sat bolt upright, and in a very short time understood that there was something wrong next door, in the Inglefields' berth; and, hastily striking a match, I tumbled as fast as ever I could pelt into my small clothes and ran out. One lamp was burning; the flame of it, however, had been dimmed till the light was very feeble; the door of the berth occupied by Mr. Edwards was ajar, and through the aperture was thrust his head. One side of the *foremost skylight was lifted*, and the second mate, Mr. Semple, was

stooping over and looking down through it. As I sprang from my berth, Captain Pipes came sprawling along struggling into a pea-coat and calling out to know what was the matter. At the same instant, forth from his cabin bolted the chief mate, and seeing Mr. Hornby's door swinging open, I concluded that he was inside his berth dressing to come out, whilst a glance in the direction of the young ladies' cabin satisfied me that one pair of bright eyes, at all events, were piercing through the black line that betokened the door as opened to the extent of a hand's breadth.

"What is it? In mercy's name what *is* it?" shouted Mr. Edwards.

"Who's that shrieking?" cried I.

"Below there! Is there murder a-doing?" yelled Mr. Semple through the skylight.

"What's it all about? What's it all about?" thundered old Pipes; whilst the chief mate added *his* question at the top of his voice, and the female shrieks in the Inglefields' cabin rose shrill and mingled with the unmistakable bawling of the colonel and the maudlin notes of some one apparently in liquor.

The Inglefields' door remained closed, and I was about to turn the handle of it without ceremony, when it was violently flung open, and, to the amazement of us all, the colonel came rolling out hugging little Hornby to his heart. We fell back as the military man let go of the owner of the *Silver Sea*, who instantly lurched towards a chair and sat down. The colonel was habited in drawers and shirt, over which he had cast a military cloak that gave him the look of a bandit in a stage burlesque. His face, or what was visible of it, was as white as the powder his wife improved her complexion with; the hair on top of his head was on end as from a struggle, and he stood breathless and shaking as he surveyed us. On the other hand, Hornby was in the attire in which the steward had put him to bed; that is to say, he was completely dressed save that he was without boots or collar. He sat rubbing his nose with all his might, and looking from his fingers to the lamp as an infant might.

The colonel roared out, "Where's Edwards?"

"Here!" answered Mr. Edwards in a sea-sick voice.

"Step out, Edwards, that I may tell you of the insult, of the outrage, that has been perpetrated upon Mrs. Inglefield and myself by Mr. Hornby there!" shouted the colonel.

"I can't step out," replied Mr. Edwards. "What's the matter? What has happened?"

"You will hardly believe what I am going to tell you," bawled the colonel, addressing us generally. "I was awakened from a sound sleep by some one standing on my arm and endeavouring to get into the bunk above mine. I'll say no more than that. We were in darkness. I immediately seized the intruder, thinking one

of the sailors had broken into our cabin to plunder us, and my wife being aroused by the sound of a struggle, cried out. I was unable for some time to distinguish the voice of the individual I grasped——"

"All a mishtake," here interrupted Hornby, continuing to rub his nose. "Colonel's sho fearfully nervous. Thought my berth wash on shtarboard side. Willing to 'pologishe, and all that short of thing, donyerknow. He'sh made my noshe bleed."

This, however, was not the fact, though he examined his fingers on removing his hand from his face as if he had no doubt of it. The mate now turned the lamp on full, whereupon there came a loud shriek from Mrs. Inglefield: "Charley! Charley! shut my door! shut my door instantly, sir!" I saved the colonel this trouble, whilst I noticed first, that Mr. Edwards's head vanished as though the strong light was rather more than he had bargained for; next that the door of his daughter's cabin was hastily shut, and then that Mr. Semple backed away from the skylight at the same moment that the chief mate, smothering a laugh, returned to his berth to sleep out the rest of his watch below.

"I should like to know," shouted the colonel, enraged by the indifference which the withdrawal of these people seemed to signify, "if this sort of thing is *often* going to happen on board this ship?—if a gentleman and his wife shall not be able to go to bed in their cabin without the risk of being broken in upon by persons disguised in drink? If so," he continued, raising his voice into a hurricane note, apparently for the edification of Mr. Edwards—"then my request to you, Captain Pipes, is that you will forthwith put us ashore, return us to the place whence you brought us, sir; for, may I be hanged if I'm the man to allow any one to subject my wife to insults of this nature."

"No inshult was intended—pure mishtake—beg to 'pologishe," mumbled Hornby. "You should have locked your door, Colonel In-guggle-field."

"Sir," bawled the colonel, "I don't *choose* to lock my door, as you term it. My wife may desire to be in readiness to escape from her berth in case of alarm. There may be reasons which I am not bound to give you, sir. We are the guests of Mr. Valentine Edwards"—aiming his voice at that gentleman's berth—"and *as* his guests we decline—yes, sir, we *decline*—to consider it necessary to use locks and bolts to protect ourselves from drunken affronts."

Here Pipes, who felt it his duty to stand up for Mr. Hornby, said, "Beg pardon, Colonel Inglefield, but you'll excuse me for observing that your language is a trifle strong, sir. Anybody may remark that Mr. Hornby has made a mistake; and, as he's apologized, I don't see the need, myself, of anything more being said about it."

"Come to bed, Charley, for goodness' sake!" cried Mrs. Inglefield, *in a half-smothered note.*

"Colonel's too nervouseh," exclaimed Hornby, making an effort to rise. "Pipeshe, give me your arm to my cabin, my lad. Very shorry, I'm sure, for what'sh happened. Shtupid mistake. Cabin going roun' an' roun' did it."

Whilst Pipes went to the little fellow, I pointed out to the colonel, in a low tone, that the blunder was entirely owing to Mr. Hornby rising from his bed still muddled with the brandy he had taken for his sickness; that it was absurd to suppose any insult was meant; and that the chances were, when the morning arrived, the little gentleman would have no recollection whatever of the circumstance.

"I know nothing about his brandy and sickness," he roared. "All that I say is, it's simply monstrous that Mrs. Inglefield should be disturbed at this hour by the fellow's drunken intrusion. He may thank his stars I did not kill him. He owes his life to the darkness which prevented me from finding anything to strike him down with. He'd grow sober fast enough were he to know how I once destroyed a Ghorawallah who was ransacking the room in which I slept, and whose movements awoke me."

And so he went on, fuming and threatening in a fashion that somehow did not very readily accord with the face he had worn when he shot out of his berth with Mr. Hornby in his arms. His wife again called to him to come to bed; on which, directing a scowl at the berth where Pipes was putting the little shipowner to rest, he bade me good-night in a sulky shout and withdrew, this time locking his door with as much noise as he could make the key produce.

CHAPTER XII.

DAMP WEATHER.

I COULD hear him grumbling to his wife for some time after I had turned in afresh, and I lay laughing heartily over the absurd incident: then fell asleep, and did not wake till the steward roused me. I glanced at the scuttle to see what the weather was like, and found the glass blind with wet. It was like looking through tears. The ship was tolerably steady, with a middling weight of wind blowing on the starboard side, as I might know by the inclination of the deck. It was half-past eight, but the complexion of the air would have made you suppose the dawn was breaking.

I dressed myself and went on deck to get a mouthful of the breeze, and when on top of the companion ladder I saw what caused the *gloom*. There was a Scotch mist blowing through the rigging,

sometimes coming along in clouds like steam, then opening for a little space, till the power of the hidden sun came whitening down through the smother and converted the bit of water it fell on into a sheet of wrinkled and snow-streaked steel. The fine rain was as wetting as a thunder-squall. The ship was under easy sail, and the canvas was slate-coloured with the moisture. Everything aloft gleamed as if oil had been capsized over it, the decks were dark and shining, and a hard, foul-weather look was given to the picture by the men on deck being dressed in black or yellow oilskins. At the wheel stood a square-built Dutch seaman with his water-proof leggings and coat swelled out by the wind, and his round, heavy, stupid, sand-brown face framed by his beard and sou'wester. He had blue eyes, with a cast in one of them, and I watched him for a moment or two whilst he squinted aloft at the weather leech of the maintop-gallantsail, then into the compass-bowl, then gave a bit of a twist to the wheel and a glance over his shoulder at the lay of the tiller, and then spat to leeward, drying his lips on the back of his hand, and once more slowly turning his eyes aloft, whilst his jaws worked upon the quid in his cheek.

It was all grey, driving drizzle behind him, the edge of the gleaming taffrail standing out sharp against it, and the spanker-sheet tugging at the block on the iron horse, for we carried no boom. I had no mind to get wet, yet I wanted to take a look round too; so I stepped over to under the lee of a quarter-boat, and then saw Pipes on the port side of the deck peering into the swelling and rolling, and opening and closing thickness. I found the ship under a maintop-gallantsail, the mainsail hauled up close to the yard, and nothing on the mizzen-mast but the spanker and topsails, though there was not wind enough to have kept our royals furled for us had the weather been clear. She was shoving through it nimbly, but so thick was it sometimes that the foam, broadening out as it came aft, would be clean cut off a few fathoms past the quarter, and the dark top-gallantsail faded in the vapour like a patch of brown smoke melting.

The mate was keeping a bright look-out somewhere near the main rigging, and there were a couple of fellows on the fore-castle similarly engaged. Pipes turning round spied me and crossed the deck. Unlike Mr. Bird, who was rigged out in oilskins, the skipper was clothed in a fur cap, long pilot-cloth coat, and half-Wellington boots. He wished me good-morning and inquired how I had slept, and added, "There was no more caterwauling after you turned in, I think; leastways, I heard nothing."

"There were no further intrusions, I suppose, captain," said I. "Mr. Hornby made no more mistakes."

"It's not for me, Mr. Aubyn, to pass opinions," said Pipes. "But isn't Colonel Inglefield what you might call a sort of bounceable

man?—a gentleman given to treat everybody he comes across as if they were common soldiers, to be sung out to at the top of his voice, and talked to as if they were machines meant by the Lord to do nothing more than shoulder arms when they're ordered and fling their hands up to their faces whenever a military officer goes past?"

"Why, Captain Pipes," said I, "you must make allowances, you know. How would *you* like to be awakened by a man standing upon your arm, trying to climb into the bunk in which your wife lies sleeping?"

"That's right enough," said he; "but then Mr. Hornby apologized; and what more could a man do, Mr. Aubyn? Mr. Hornby was just a bit slewed by the liquor he'd taken to caulk down his sickness, and that circumstance ought to have excused his mistake, and made the colonel willing to say nothing more about it. Mr. Hornby's a gentleman anyhow—the last individual in the world to annoy the feelings of a lady; and if the colonel can't see that, then what I say is, let him shave himself and clear some of the hair out of his vision."

The honest fellow's square face took a stern look as he sent his little eyes rolling round the thickness.

Spite of the protection of the boat, however, the wet came sweeping up between the keel of it and the ship's rail, and made the deck no pleasant place for a chat. So I returned to the cabin, thankful for the shelter of it, and not a little grateful to feel that I was not captain or mate, with the responsibility of a ship upon me, wet watches to stand, and the anxieties of blind days such as this we were having, and of black nights such as we were bound to get.

It was not yet breakfast time, and I was about to re-enter my berth; but at the end of the cabin, sitting at the thwartship table, was Miss Edwards. She was turning over the pages of a magazine, and made an amazingly handsome figure as she sat with her white forehead resting on her hands, the fingers of which were hidden in the hair over her brow. The slate-coloured light slanted down upon her through the skylight and streamed through the scuttles on either hand. Betwixt us the swinging-trays oscillated with the rolling of the ship, and there was the glitter of glass now and then when a lift of the stern sent the dull light flowing to the tumbler-racks.

She greeted me very cordially, and I sat down alongside of her. This end of the cabin was the right kind of place for a *tête-à-tête*. It was made a sort of compartment of by the ends of the berths bulkheading either side of it. The piano was here, and here too were the bookcases. The rudder trunk, full of the groaning of the controlled helm, came with a slant down amidships, and *sitting against this and looking forwards, you saw the rows of*

berths, the tables, the massive pillar of the mizzen-mast coming through the deck above and piercing the carpet under foot, scarcely to be imagined a portion of the towering height of spars that lifted their heavy spaces of canvas to the wind.

"I hope you slept well, Miss Edwards," said I.

"Very well indeed."

"And Miss Inglefield?"

"She is so much better this morning that she wanted to get up. I have prevailed upon her, however, to remain in bed until after breakfast."

"How is she to get her breakfast?"

"I must wait upon her."

"And your father? will he be able to dress himself?"

"I have asked him, and he says the steward can give him all the assistance he requires. He has never been rendered *quite* helpless, Mr. Aubyn."

Here I spied old Pipes come in a furtive sort of way down the companion steps and sneak along to his berth. His shaggy coat was bright with wet, and a large drop of moisture sparkled like a diamond at the end of his nose.

"He does not want you to see him in that rig," said I laughing. "He is quite a sea-dandy. He is off to brush his hair and make himself handsome for breakfast. Did you hear the disturbance last night?"

"Yes," she replied, with a fine light of merriment in her noble black eyes. "Poor Mr. Hornby! I hope his sea-sickness will not last; it might lead him into other mistakes."

"Let us trust, Miss Edwards, that Mrs. Inglefield will consider Mr. Hornby's blunder as the issue of an uncontrollable admiration for her."

"Oh, no; she screamed too loudly to persuade me of such a thing."

"Perhaps that was in order that we might all know about Hornby's compliment."

All this ill-nature on my part she might have relished had the Inglefields not been her papa's guests. I saw her contempt of them in her smile, and the brief spell of silence that she let follow my remark took a good deal of meaning from the expressive downwards cast of her eyes. She then changed the subject by asking me about the weather. Suddenly the steward came along and, giving me a bow, said that Mr. Hornby had inquired if I was up and dressed, and if so, would I be good enough to step into his berth. I immediately complied, and on entering the little man's cabin found him lying dressed on his bed with a rug over him. He looked exceedingly small in his bunk, and his face grey and old as it lay in the hollow of the pillow. I closed the door and asked him *how he felt*.

"Why, no longer sea-sick, but used-up, feverish, shaky, and all that sort of thing, don't you know," he replied. "I am much obliged to you for coming to me, Mr. Aubyn. I am under the impression that I must have taken a drop too much last night. Eh? am I right, now?" cried he, poking up his head, and then peering at me with it on one side like a bird.

I smiled and said, "You were sea-sick, and sought, as I think successfully, to drown the feeling in merriment."

"Will you tell me what I did—as a friend now, Mr. Aubyn? I have asked the steward, who is rather a fool, and he says he took no notice. I have a sort of notion of having quarrelled with somebody; indeed, I could almost swear that I had been concerned in a tussle. What did I do? Will you tell me?" and the little man, propping himself on his elbows, looked at me with an anxiety that was quite piteous.

Now here was a chance for some excellent sport had I had a mind for a joke. But it was not only that Mr. Hornby was, in a sense, my host; he had called me to him as a friend, and I should have acted very meanly to betray him merely to get a laugh out of his remorse and horror, and amusement out of a quarrel which I might easily have created between him and the colonel. So I told him with a grave face that it was perfectly true he had taken a drop more than he was well able to carry, that the steward had helped him to his berth, and that in the small hours he had risen to get a glass of water or something of that kind, as I supposed, but, missing his cabin, had awakened me by the scuffling noise he had made whilst routing about, and that Captain Pipes then came into the saloon and saw him safely stowed away for the rest of the night.

"Is that all?" he asked with an expression that hovered betwixt anxiety and relief.

"Is not that enough?" I replied, laughing.

He looked delighted. "It must have been a nightmare," he exclaimed. "I could swear that I had fought with somebody. The abominable sickness, Mr. Aubyn! Think of an abstemious man like me taking a glass too much! Did I make *much* of a fool of myself—chatter nonsensically, laugh *quite* irrationally, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

"On the contrary, you fell into an argument with Colonel Inglefield, and spoke with much good sense."

"You astonish me!" he cried, grinning excitedly. "Before the steward helped me to my berth, had Miss Edwards retired?"

"Long before."

This seemed to render him perfectly happy. "You have immensely relieved my mind," he exclaimed, extending his little hand. "Upon my word, had I conducted myself as I imagined I *did*, I should never have had the courage to show my nose

to the ladies again. I should have imprisoned myself in this berth—I should, indeed. I'll get up now. I'll breakfast at the table." With great agility he tumbled out of his bunk, exhibiting in his manner no further symptoms of sea-sickness, nor even of the used-up feverish condition he had complained of.

"Miss Edwards," said I, returning to my seat alongside her: "congratulate me on beginning this day with an act of virtue! I have made our little friend Hornby happy;" and I told her what had passed, and how I had answered his questions. "The temptation to horrify him was very great," I continued, "but he looked so small and so piteous that my heart failed me."

"I can quite understand the temptation," she exclaimed; "and I am not at all sure, had I been in your place, that I should have resisted it," added she, with her rich face lighted up with a merry, roguish expression, that made me see, despite her stately figure and grand manners—queenly, as I have called them—there beat in her beautiful bosom the heart of a born romp.

"But as I have played a very honourable part," said I, "you must support me in it. Mr. Hornby's great anxiety seemed to be to ascertain whether *you* had gone to bed before his articulation grew harsh and confused. I told him yes, you had withdrawn, and the emotion of relief that beamed in his countenance was not a little moving. Therefore, Miss Edwards, we must all agree to know nothing about the blunder he committed last night. Oh, there's the colonel! Good-morning, Colonel Inglefield."

He came out of his cabin and approached us, looking peculiarly hairy, I thought. There was a touch of sullenness in his loud voice as he shouted, "Good-morning, sir. Good-morning, Miss Edwards. How's Agnes?" and being answered, he inquired after Mr. Edwards, and then informed us that he hoped his wife would be able to get up for lunch.

"That is good news, colonel," said I. "At this rate we shall all have recovered after the first day, and be able to fulfil our duties as pleasure-seekers without further inconvenience."

"You do not inquire after Mr. Hornby," said Miss Edwards.

He scowled at her, and said, "You cannot be aware of what took place last night. Why should I inquire after Mr. Hornby? had I served him as he merited, then, by George! I should be asking whether the fellow still lived."

"I have just seen him," I remarked. "He is absolutely ignorant of what took place."

"I don't believe it," bawled the colonel. "It's the subterfuge of cowardice, Mr. Aubyn. He desires to sneak out of the responsibility of insulting my wife and me by concealing his little person behind a brandy bottle."

Thought I; if Hornby was not so little, I wonder if the colonel would talk in this way?

"I assure you," I continued, "that he recollects nothing of what occurred. I beg that you will believe this. I have disposed of his fears that he made a fool of himself by telling him they are unfounded; and I really trust that you will see your way to let this unfortunate incident rest."

"What does your father say?" said the colonel, addressing Miss Edwards.

"You will find him in his cabin," she answered.

"Of course I don't want any unpleasantness," exclaimed the colonel, who, I was pretty sure, really believed Hornby's plea of forgetfulness to be nothing but the language of sheer funk, and was therefore bent on giving himself some military airs on the strength of it. "As I told you last night, Aubyn, I once killed a Ghora-wallah for a smaller offence. Hornby is Edwards's friend, and let that stand in his favour. If I am to be told that the man was rendered actually *irresponsible* by liquor, why, by George! I suppose I must believe it. But I'll first consult Edwards;" and so saying, he stepped to Mr. Edwards's cabin, knocked hard, bawled out, "It's Colonel Inglefield!" and went in.

"Our friend talks in a rather blood-thirsty manner," said I to Miss Edwards.

"I think him a very amusing person, don't you?" said she.

"Very; that is, when Hornby brings him out."

"Papa has known Colonel and Mrs. Inglefield for some years, and he thought their daughter would make a nice companion for me during the voyage. We could have got many to join us had the journey been for three weeks or a month; but the name of the Cape of Good Hope seemed to frighten everybody but the Inglefields."

"And me."

"I am sure we are extremely obliged to you for your company. You were very good to accept. The sacrifice must be great; you are leaving your club and the gaities of London for a rather tedious trip, I fear. Yet I know papa values your society, and would have been much disappointed had you declined his invitation."

I listened to and looked at her attentively, wanting to see if there was any irony in this. The apology she had appeared to find necessary for the Inglefields was not unlikely to render her a little satirical in her compliments to me. However, she appeared perfectly in earnest; so I thanked her in a sentence, suppressing the desire her beauty and sincerity excited in me to assure her not to suppose I was guilty of self-sacrifice in forming one of a party that included her.

Meanwhile the steward and his mate were busy in preparing the breakfast-table. The cabin was dim with the clouds of drizzle which swept athwart the skylights; now and again the ship would

vary her steady rolling by a sharp jump that caused the rudder to grind hard upon its pintles as the counter sank into the shrill rushing of white water that was swept aft. I daresay I should have found the atmosphere gloomy enough if it hadn't been for the way in which Miss Edwards lighted it up with her radiant black eyes and bright blushing smiles, and the gleam that would come off from a jewel on her finger or in her ears, or from some silver ornaments she wore on her wrists and around her neck when she'd raise her hand or turn to look above when she talked.

This was about the hour, I think, when I first began to wonder in my half self-hidden manner, whether she had a lover, whether she had given her heart away, and what ambition her father had concerning her. A rich man, such as Edwards, owning a gem like this girl of his, would surely be satisfied with nothing short of a very fine and handsome setting for it. And yet *that* wasn't it, either. You could not look at her and think for a moment of anything but her own will directing her hand into another's. The father of such a woman might have his ambitious wishes; but the possessor of eyes like hers, of a form so noble and dignified, of a character that was to be guessed from manners at once serene and determined, was more likely to lead her papa than to be controlled by him; and I should have been willing to bet any man a farthing's worth of silver spoons (to employ Jack's elegant language) that if ever she became a wife her husband would be the choice of her heart and nobody else in this immense world full of males. To be sure, these were queer speculations to come forking up in the midst of my chat with her. What brought them into my mind was the notion that she was just the sort of girl to have a love secret of her own; to have a passion for some one who had no notion that he had her heart. Dark, inscrutable, beautiful eyes will kindle curious fantasies in a youth's brain. Anyway, I felt that here was a nature as deep as the ocean over which we were sailing; and when once the idea that a woman is profound seizes you, you are apt to people the depths of that quality in her with imaginations, just as wiseacres tell you that at the bottom of the sea are all sorts of wonderful shining fish which nobody has ever seen.

The colonel stayed in Mr. Edwards's berth till the steward rang the breakfast-bell, and then he and Pipes and Hornby all emerged at once from the several cabins. The little man looked a bit nervous as he stepped up to Miss Edwards and shook her hand; but her manner put him at his ease as if by magic. He might thoroughly persuade himself from it that if he had acted the fool on the previous evening, she had gone to bed before he had began his nonsense; and you saw that her opinion was all that he cared about, as he slewed round on his little heels after greeting her, and inquired how *Mrs. Inglefield* was.

"*Better, thanks,*" replied the colonel sulkily; and as I passed

him to take my seat, he hoarsely whispered, "It's Mr. Edwards's wish that there should be no allusion to last night. The subject therefore *drops*," and suiting the action to the word, he fell violently upon a chair and glared about the table to see what there was to eat.

"I'm glad to find that you have quite recovered from your seasickness, Mr. Hornby," said I.

"Quite," he answered in a sprightly voice; "I may say *quite*. But it's not wonderful. I'm a better sailor than I look, and should have been all right, but for—" he checked himself with a squint at the colonel. "How's my friend, your papa, Miss Edwards?"

"Well enough he thinks to get up after breakfast," she answered; and then hearing about Miss Inglefield, "Come," cried the little man cheerily, "let us hope we shall all be perfectly seasoned before sundown. What sort of weather have you on deck, Pipes?"

"Thick as mud, Mr. Hornby, and the ship under easy canvas. There's nothing to do but grope when you plump into feather beds after this pattern," rejoined Pipes, who looked very square and burnished about the head.

Then there was a bustle. The colonel had to take some breakfast to his wife, Miss Edwards to attend upon Miss Inglefield, and the German steward on Mr. Edwards. The colonel, having a large appetite and being very impatient, made haste to return. I heard him grumbling in his gizzard about its being a pity that there was no stewardess to wait upon the ladies; but I think I rightly interpreted his temper when I put it down to a wish that we should see he had not forgiven last night's work, though he was willing to say no more about it.

"Are we in the Bay of Biscay O yet?" asked Hornby.

"Not fur off, sir," responded Pipes cheerfully.

"Think you're wise, captain, in sailing in a fog?" cried the colonel. "Isn't it a safe rule to 'heave to,' as you call it?"

"Couldn't make a greater mistake," rejoined the skipper. "With your torpsail aback, what control have you over your ship if you want to get out of the road in a hurry?"

"It won't do to think of risks," said I. "At that rate there'll not be an hour of this voyage which our imaginations cannot fit with a danger."

"Right for you, Mr. Aubyn," cried Pipes.

"Ay, but what Captain Pipes seems to forget is this," shouted the colonel; "the *Silver Sea* is a wooden ship. Most vessels now afloat are of iron. Consequently were we run into in a fog of this kind, the object that struck us would in all probability be of metal, and the result is we should sink in a jiffey. That's what Captain Pipes forgets."

"You can't say I forgot it, colonel," retorted Pipes, "because, you see, I've never thought of it. As to the *Silver Sea* sinking in a jiffy because she's built of wood, who's going to make me believe it? Iron! why I'd a hundred times over rather be aboard of wood in a collision. It's the iron vessel that founders as a man falls when he overbalances himself from a window; whilst the wooden craft goes on floating so stubbornly that you may read of men-o'-warships trying their hands at such derelicts with torpedoes and failing to scatter them with all their blasting."

Arguments of this kind were not overpoweringly interesting, and one was glad when Miss Edwards quietly changed the subject. The truth is, none of us was in a very interesting mood. The gloomy atmosphere had a deal to do with it, no doubt; it was depressing to glance at the skylights and see the humidity, crawling and creeping upon the glass, and then again to feel the short sullen movements of the ship as though, like a sentient thing, she was bothered by the wet smother and rendered irritable by the grip that curbed her. But the colonel was as damping as the weather; you saw his face working fiercely away behind his whiskers and moustache as he devoured his breakfast, and his eyes settling upon every one who spoke as if impatient to begin an argument. I really cannot say whether Hornby was visited by dim suspicions that something unpleasant *had* happened between him and the colonel during the night; I'd notice him sometimes staring at the military man with his bright birdlike eyes and his brow knitted as though struggling to solve a perplexity; but the others of us who were in the secret found the colonel's manner intelligible enough to merit no notice; nevertheless, I for one was not a little glad when breakfast came to an end.

"Is it still wet, Mr. Aubyn?" asked Miss Edwards.

I got on to the companion steps to make sure, and said, "Yes; a complete London drizzle, quite tepid in temperature and blowing along in straight lines of small rain."

"Well," she exclaimed with a pout, "I must see if there is any sunshine in those bookcases. Mr. Hornby, for such a voyage as this you should really have provided nothing but blue sky."

"If a cheque to the order of the clerk of the weather for five hundred pounds could ensure the sun shining all day, I'd make out the draft at once," said the little fellow effusively. "But unhappily, bright skies and smooth seas and all that sort of thing, don't you know, are not purchasable commodities. No, even the power of money has its limits."

"Don't go and tell them that in the city—eh, Aubyn?" bawled the colonel. "Though, confound them, it's true, and I like to think of it. For it's all moneyocracy nowadays—vulgarity without an *h* in its mouth but very expensively dressed, wandering about with a *cheque-book* in its hand, and impudently believing that if it chose,

it could postpone the date of the world's ending, by George ! by undertaking to pay down a sum of money in what shopkeepers call prompt cash."

"Fair or foul," said I, giving no heed to this outfly, "I shall go on deck for one. Miss Edwards, I think I could prescribe an apparel that should render you fog-proof. You must learn to triumph over wet weather. We shall probably have our share of it, and it will not do to let every damp day imprison you below."

She looked as if she had a mind to join me ; then with a smile said no, she would wait ; it might clear up soon. So I left her with little Hornby and the colonel, and bundling into a suit of water-proof, I went on deck armed with a big pipe, and planted myself in the lee of the galley, that being the best bit of shelter I could find.

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. INGLEFIELD IS BETTER.

I WAS very fond of the companionship of the *Silver Sea*. Greatly as I was charmed by Miss Edwards, I am not sure that on the whole I did not then prefer the society of the ship to hers. It is a queer unsentimental confession to blunder into, but then it is not in every man's power to fall in love at first sight. Be this as it may, when on deck I was *with* the ship, whereas below I could only think of her.

It was the poet Campbell who bought a picture of a girl and fell in love with it, talking of it and pointing to it as if it were flesh and blood, a real sweetheart. A passion of that kind for a picture is a trifle beyond me ; though I can understand the heart's devotion for the inanimate. But a ship is not lifeless. To be sure, you can dissect her and resolve her components into bits of timber or plates of iron, and fragmentize her into a medley of spars, ropes, and planks. Death serves the loveliest woman so. But when a completed fabric, with the impulse of the eternal sea informing her like a spirit, powerful and obedient, tractable as a horse though with the capacity of a tigress's madness in her when enraged by the tormenting winds, why, then no thing of life is more living. As her commander you may so fall in love with her that she shall head the list of your sweethearts ; as a passenger, such as I was, you may keep your heart whole, yet find a deep enchantment in her company. It was so with me. I had felt the fascination even when a bitterly hard-worked young sailor, and when there was *nothing more to look at than a deeply-laden bucket of a brig ;*

was renewing the old feeling now and finding a higher emotion in it, because the ship I was in was a beautiful vessel, and because there was no hardship, nothing to set one cursing the life, standing betwixt me and the sentiment of the glorious ocean.

Well, let no young lady turn up her pretty nose at this stuff. She may find her sex revenged ere this pen be laid down. But I will repeat in this cold place—and damp it was to leeward of the galley, amid the driving smother through which we were jogging towards the rolling Bay of Biscay—that magical as I had immediately found the society of Miss Edwards, I took no more pleasure then in being with her than in standing alone in some corner of the deck of the *Silver Sea*, and listening to the songs she sang as she sailed along, in marking her proud contemptuous spurning of the surges, in interpreting the inarticulate poetry of her movements, and in partaking the triumph of her domination of the measureless and fathomless deep.

But however much a man may be in love with a ship, the sort of weather to test his affection is the driving, gyrating, warm-bath sort of drizzle the *Silver Sea* was in the thick of. Now and then it would come along in a burst of glistening smoke, and transform old Pipes and the man at the wheel into blotches. You might have compared the *Silver Sea* to a pretty woman with a cold in her head. It is perfectly true, as a poetical skipper once said to me, that a sailing vessel is like a handsome actress who'll look bland and beautiful in white satin that leaves exposed the snow of her shoulders, or wild and awful in some scene of passion that gives her streaming hair to the wind whilst she is rent and infuriated by the storm of emotion. "So, sir," said my poetical friend, "whilst lifting her white heights to the blue when all is peaceful above and below, a vessel is a gentle and lovely object; and a terrible one when, driven by the gale, she flies along the boiling seas with arched rigging and under a fragment of bursting canvas."

Yes; but what is to be made of her when a Scotch mist drives like steam between her masts, and she squeezes, groping, through the veil of vapour, with dribbling scuppers and dripping tarpaulins; when all the light upon her is a grey gleam in the wet sails, and when the yellow figure of a seaman swinging upon the topmast rigging, with the hinder flap of his sou'wester standing out like a gull's tail, disappears before he reaches the crossrees? Upon my word, the picture was a trifle depressing. Almost abreast of me in the lee foreshrouds, stood a lobsouser at work on some chafing gear. His rough face came out clear upon the slate-coloured thickness behind him; the drops glistened in his whiskers and beard, and now and again he'd pause to squirt some tobacco juice *into the sea*. He was an oldish man and slow, with a countenance *indicative of disgust of life*, and a sturdy growler, as any one might

have guessed, by the hang of his under lip, with a sour twist in the corners of his mouth that was like saying, "Whose dog am I?"

As I stood smoking and watching him, I thought to myself, if that old chap should fall overboard and be drowned, who'd mourn him? There was a gull in our wake that might swoop down with a dull scream to his sou'wester as he came up, and perhaps, by listening, you'd hear a moan in the wind as the oil-skinned figure sank to rise no more. His chest would be overhauled, a pipe or two found, a suit of clothes, three or four sticks of tobacco, a shore-going shirt and the like. There would be nothing more left of him, and an offer of ten thousand pounds for the discovery, might fail to obtain so simple a bit of information for you as—whose son was he?

Lord, the loneliness of such a man as that, now! To see him standing up in the rigging there against the grey smother, and think that if human life should be bereft of its faith in the existence of God the Father and of God the Son, the breaking of a ratline would reduce that breathing and sentient thing to something of less account than yonder patch of weed sliding its short length of dark green over the heads of the seas! No, no! such a man as that would have no wife, nor children, nor relatives. I could swear to it by the look of him, knowing the type, as though he had come to me and told me his story. It was a bit maudlin in me to find something like pathos in the blowing of a curl of iron-grey hair under his sou'wester. And indeed the whole fancy about him was silly and depressing. But after you have lived with sailors, and left them, and then return to them, you'll find yourself moralizing over every one of them you meet at sea, for *there* the reality of Jack's life comes home. A dog's career, is it not? the only labourer in the world who, whenever the need arises, can be made to work for his employers twenty-four hours in every sea-day; whose wages would be disdained by a crossing-sweeper; fed with vile food, and often villanously housed. Poor mercantile Jack! you do all the real, bitter, savage work of the deep; you are the true ocean hero, but no songs are sung about you, no books made about you, no pity shown, no interest taken in you. It is the blue-jacket firing a gun behind a floating fortress of iron who gets the glory; you, fighting heaven's fury in crazy, deep-sunk ships; you, valiantly contending with the hundred remorseless antagonisms bred by meanness, rapacity, and such an indifference to your life as makes the shocking neglect red murder itself; you get no honour, no applause, no reward; you sink to join the thousand green corpses of sailor-men, and England takes no heed that yet another of the best of her sons is lost to her.

Well, it would be the figure of that surly and sour old seaman

up there, and the picture of the wet decks and half-veiled ship, and the eclipse of sky and sea by the soul-damping clouds of vapour, which put these thoughts into my head. The sailor, finding me watching him, cast his eyes upon me now and again, and I thought it would not take much to induce him to bawl out : "Ay, ay, it's all very well for you to be exposin' of yourself to this here weather ; you, who are fresh from a tip-top breakfast, and can go below when you please ; you, who have nobody to say sir to, from one end of this blooming old hooker to the other ; you, who can sleep in all night, walk the quarter deck to win'ward, and snigger with the gells over us common sailors. But tarn to and ship for three pun five a month as I have, drink of the tea that's served out to us, and job with a sheath-knife at the lumps of dead horse which are brought forrards in the kids, and be kept at work on such muckin' jobs as sarvin' a shroud with canvas smothered in tar, and I lay ye'd think yourself something more than a fool for standin' down there in the wet, staring up at me as if I was a compresant holdin' on to nothing in a gale of wind."

I knocked the ashes out of my pipe, and was going aft.

"Hullo !" roared out the old chap, staring at the sea ahead of the ship ; "who's been and chucked *him* overboard ?"

For the moment I really thought he had caught sight of a man swimming out there, and, full of excitement, I hopped on to the rail and looked over. Almost abreast of where I stood there floated, rising and falling upon the seas, a great dead Newfoundland dog chained to a large kennel. The poor brute was drowned ; I was sure of that. He lay on his side, and was swollen ; and I was glad to think he was out of his misery, for had he been alive and swimming, we should still have lost sight of him in a few moments. Pipes was not at all likely to have sent a boat and risked her loss and that of the men in her in that thick weather, and consequently I should have been bothered by thinking of the struggle of the fine brute after we had passed him. Slow as our pace was, yet the dog and kennel seemed to glide by with wonderful speed, and in a few seconds both objects had vanished in the vapour that stood like a wall a cable's length past the quarter. The old seaman, who had watched them till they were hidden, spat, and went on slowly with his work.

It was but a trifling incident, yet I will own myself a man very prone to be impressed by small things of this kind. Imagination is not a blessing. Mine was of a kind to go to work without the consent of my will—upon such a marine detail as that which had slipped past into the throat of the fog, and to draw a dispiriting influence out of it. Yet who could have seen the carcass of what had undoubtedly been a noble dog chained to its kennel without falling a bit pensive with thoughts of the battle it had *waged for life*, the burden it towed, the chain that weighted it

till the weary limbs gave up and the salt water strangled the exhausted creature? One thinks of the grand sagacity of a dog of that kind, and pictures the eyes, almost human with despair, looking round and round at the grey blank circumference.

"How should such a fine animal as that, chained to its kennel, come to be washing about here?" said I to the mariner in the fore shrouds.

"Why," answered he in a hoarse note that perfectly fitted the dreary, streaming picture of the ship, "I'll allow that some vessel's gone down. The kennel was on deck, unlashd, and floated off along with the dog when the ship sunk."

"Very likely," said I. "Poor brute!"

"Well, I dunno about poor brute," he replied. "He'd better be dead then kep' alive at sea. He's not the only ship's dog washin' about, you lay. Scores of 'em are drowned every month, the only difference being that *they've* got two legs and wears breeches, master." And here he looked round as though desirous of finding a shipmate near to overhear him.

"Oh, you're talking of sailors," said I.

"I'm talkin' of ship's dogs," he replied still more hoarsely, "other-wise tarmed sailors—commen sailors. The only pity is that the kennels they occupy aren't chained to 'em, for if every sailor man as is drowned took his foksle overboard along with him, there'd come, I dessay, in time to be cleaner an' hairier quarters for them as survived."

"You're pretty comfortable aboard this ship, aren't you?"

"Oh, I'm not saying nothen against *this* ship," said he with a cunning squint at me, and then a glance aft to see if the mate on duty was watching him. "*We're* supposin' to be pleasurin', you know, sir;" and he dropped his work a moment to comb his fingers down his face and shake the wet off. I smiled at this comment of his upon "*pleasurin'*," and felt that he was a man with whom I could pass an hour very agreeably in conversation: for there is no company in the world to equal that of a growling, sour old sailor; but, knowing something of sea-discipline, I guessed that the mate, who'd sometimes step over to leeward to take a peep along the deck, would not be very well pleased to see me talking to one of the watch whilst at work; so I got off the rail, and having by this time had enough of the drizzle, I gave myself a swing to rid my waterproofs of the wet and went below.

When I entered the cabin, I found Hornby reading at the end of it not far distant from Miss Edwards, who was knitting or sewing or doing something of that kind, and the colonel lying back in an American chair, in slippers, his legs hoisted up, and a pair of glasses on his nose, through which he was staring into a book. I pulled off my oilskins and took a seat near Miss Edwards, and told her about the dog and kennel that had gone by. This

interested her, and the way in which she brightened up into talk induced one to guess, that she had been bored and was glad of fresh company.

After a bit, Mr. Edwards came out of his berth, leaning on the steward, and within a minute of his appearance Miss Inglefield arrived. Hornby hopped up, and was all briskness and smirking genteel sympathy. Was Miss Inglefield better? he *hoped* she was. Sea-sickness was a fearful thing. He had been horribly unwell himself, but had quite recovered. It only wanted a little patience and all that sort of thing, don't you know.

Miss Inglefield did not look much the worse for her bout. I thought her now to be a bit prettier than I had before found her. Her gold-coloured hair was very silky and plentiful, and the parting on one side made her demure, quiet face rather piquant. She smiled somewhat nervously in response to Hornby's eager, old beau-like greetings, and answered him in words I could not catch, with a glance at her father, as if his face was the barometer she was accustomed to make or shorten sail by. She then passed on to her mother's berth.

Edwards gave a groan and then a laugh as he sank into a chair.

"Recovered from your sickness, Hornby?" he inquired.

"Quite: and you?"

"Well, I felt a little squeamish early this morning, but, as tragedians say after they have seen a ghost, 'Tis gone!' at least I think so;" and he paused to *feel* the heave the ship was then giving as though uncertain of himself.

I asked after his gout.

"It's not the sort of weather for it," he replied, with his jolly smile, though turning up his eyes, not without forlornness in them, to the skylight. "It's in my left heel badly, and my left arm, from the elbow to the wrist, feels as if a carpenter were planing it."

"You cannot expect the sea to cure you at once, papa," said Miss Edwards.

"I expect nothing, my love," he replied. "Colonel, how are you getting on? how's your wife?"

The other put down his book and pulled the glasses off his nose.

"She'll be up for lunch," he shouted; "I've insisted upon it. My notion is one can humour sickness—make it go on lasting. Take a youth going to sea for the first time, Edwards; he's so ill that he feels he must die. Mind—there's no nonsense: die he *must*—that's his conviction. Yet the mate drives him up the mast with a grease-pot in his hand, and the lad gets through his work. Were he a passenger he would keep his bed for a week."

"*Perfectly true!*" cried Hornby. "A very sensible view indeed."

"You'll forgive me, Edwards," continued the colonel, laughing hoarsely and looking gratified; "if I suggest that even rheumatic gout may be over-nursed. It's like sea-sickness. Imagine yourself forced to jump about, to run and pull, and so on. The exercise would soon get your bones right."

"My dear colonel," rejoined Edwards good-humouredly, "if at a banquet I were to pierce your heels with a bradawl, and then, when the pain was most excruciating, insist upon your rising and returning thanks for the ladies in a humorous speech, could you talk, do you think?"

"Well, perhaps not," shouted the colonel.

"Nor could I now jump about and run, and so on. You healthy men have no sympathy. You're like a fellow perspiring in a Turkish bath in December, and wondering how on earth people's teeth can be chattering in the north-easterly wind outside."

"I hope this weather will not last long," said Miss Edwards, abruptly changing the conversation, possibly from distrust of the colonel's face that was full of noisy argument. And then she told her papa of the dog and kennel I had seen, and added that I considered they signified a shipwreck in the neighbourhood.

The colonel had not heard me when I spoke to her on the subject, and he now rapped out: "Eh! what's that, Mr. Aubyn? a shipwreck? where?"

I explained that one of the sailors had suggested that the kennel had floated off the deck of a foundering ship; it was one way to account for the objects washing about in the sea here.

"Nothing more likely," shouted he. "This is the very weather for shipwrecks. Are we under much sail?"

"A pretty fair amount," said I.

"Are we moving fast?"

"About six or seven knots an hour," I replied.

"Tell you what it is, Edwards," he bawled; "Pipes may be a good man, but in my opinion he's foolhardy."

"No, no!" cried little Hornby, shaking his head rapidly.

"I say yes, yes!" roared the colonel. "What's the duty of a careful captain in a fog? Why, by George! to heave the ship to, of course. And yet we are rushing blindfold into—into anything that may happen to be in the way."

"Well, I feel perfectly safe," said Mr. Edwards.

"And so do I," observed Hornby. "What do you say, Miss Edwards?"

"Oh, we must hope there is nothing to be afraid of," she replied.

Had she not been present I believe I should have played upon the colonel's nervousness, which would have been an easy task, as

one saw by his jerks and starts, as he glared up at the skylights and looked around him into the darksome corners of the cabin, that my suggestion that there had been a shipwreck in the neighbourhood had rather upset him. As it happened, Mr. Edwards, quite unconsciously, increased the gloom that hung upon the brow of the loud-voiced military man by saying: "Hornby, I suppose the *Silver Sea* is provided with plenty of life-saving appliances in case of disaster?"

"There is no ship afloat carries better boats," replied the little fellow; "and there are a lot of life-buoys and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

"All what sort of thing, don't you know, besides life-buoys?" shouted the colonel.

"Spars and hencoops," said Hornby.

"Humph!" growled the colonel. "Just the sort of articles to knock people on the head among the waves and sink the strongest swimmers."

"Pray," said I, observing Miss Edwards to look wistfully and thinking this sort of talk nonsense, "let us remember that we are a party of pleasure-seekers, that we are aboard a stout, staunch, handsome clipper ship, and that we intend to be at home, please God, in sound health by what the Yankees call the fall. Eh, Mr. Hornby? There is no use in undergoing shipwreck every day by talking about it."

The colonel jumped up. "I'll go and satisfy my own mind!" he cried. "I'm an old sailor and don't believe in driving a ship through a fog;" and he bundled into his wife's cabin for his boots.

Hornby presently leaving us, I was able to say a few words to Mr. Edwards about his little friend's drunken skylarking on the previous night. He agreed with me that it was best to allow Hornby to remain in ignorance of his behaviour, as it not only kept him free from embarrassment, but it would also pacify Mrs. Inglefield, when she perceived for herself that the little man had no recollection of his misconduct.

"The colonel seems rather disposed to be bad-tempered, papa," exclaimed Miss Edwards.

"No, my dear, it is his manner. He suffered seriously from his liver in India, Aubyn, and never quite recovered his nerves. He is sound enough at bottom. Besides," exclaimed the old gentleman, bursting into a laugh, "we must all allow that last night's business was quite enough to justify a little sulkiness in him this morning. I didn't dare linger in my doorway when the light was turned on; I should have choked with laughter, and that would never have done."

"Well, dear, I earnestly hope this voyage may benefit you," said *she*.

"My daughter speaks as if she had already had enough of the sea, Aubyn—and here we are not two days out yet!" said the old fellow.

"The sea *is* a little tedious—you must admit that," said she, with a half glance at me.

"But we mustn't admit it," I replied. "Here we are for the purpose of enjoying ourselves, Miss Edwards; and it will not do to call the play dull before the curtain is fairly lifted."

She twitched down the corners of her mouth and went on with her work. I had not before particularly noticed the length and loveliness of her eyelashes. They gave a rare shadow of beauty to her rich complexion as they drooped to her cheeks with the downward-bending of her gaze. Her father looked at her thoughtfully, running his eye over her figure, till you saw the pride it gave him replacing his other mood and kindling in his face. Our glances met.

"After all, Aubyn," said he, "this voyage is really a last resource of mine. If I am benefited or cured, shall I not be repaid for the cost of a few months of tediousness? You see I make no stranger of you, I involve you in this spell of *ennui* for the sake of my gout. You are very kind to make one of us."

"You have thanked me enough, I am sure. If you had any idea of the enjoyment I am getting and mean to go on getting out of this voyage, you would know to whom gratitude is really due."

Here little Hornby's return caused us to drop the subject. The brief chat, however, made me think that Edwards ought to have foreseen that his daughter would not take long to be bored by her association with people like the Inglesfields. She would have been better pleased, I dare say, to have made the journey alone with her father. Of all their friends—and I believe they knew plenty of people—the Inglesfields, one might have sworn, would be the very last to please Margaret Edwards with their company. Indeed, I thought then, and have always thought since, that the trip was badly managed. The ladies should have had a woman to wait upon them. Then I do not consider that our ship's company was numerous enough, remembering that the voyage was one of pleasure, to call it so. Likewise, there should have been more guests—room could easily have been found—pleasant people really fond of the sea and able to enter into the spirit of the health-seeking adventure. Of course I understood the difficulty of getting the sort of friends one would like to have to accompany one in a sailing ship to the Cape of Good Hope and back. But it was no reason if the best could not be had why the worst should have been chosen.

Presently the colonel returned with his hairy face glistening. He was followed by Pipes, whose shaggy coat, by holding the wet, caused him to appear crystallized.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Hornby, I'm sure," said the skipper, whose square countenance wore an aggrieved expression; "but I should take it very kind of you, sir, if you'd inform the colonel here that I've been thirty-five years at sea, out of which time I have held a master's certificate for eighteen years, and that this ship is perfectly safe in my charge."

Hornby looked indignant and tossed his head, twisting his small figure about. "Really, colonel—" he began.

"Look here, Hornby!" shouted the colonel; "Pipes mistakes. He's too sensitive. He's an old sailor and so am I. I simply desired to point out to him that, in my opinion, a ship in weather of this kind ought to be brought to a stand—hove to; you know the meaning of that term, Aubyn; and, by George, if a man at my time of life isn't to be allowed to have an opinion of his own, why, confound it—"

"Mr. Hornby," exclaimed Pipes, "the colonel comes up to me and says, 'Captain, you've got too much sail on.'"

"So you have! it's quite true, by Jingo!" shouted the colonel.

"I answered," continued Pipes, "that I knew my own business; and that if I didn't, I wasn't going to school to learn it from a military officer."

"Yes, yes, that's all very well," cried the colonel; "but if you should run us into a ship, the military officer may be drowned, you know—he and his wife and daughter, Captain Pipes; and, by Jupiter! under such circumstances, the military officer, as you call him, has a right to offer a protest against the possibility of risks."

"Risks!" exclaimed Pipes, growing hot. "There always *are* risks at sea. But what are the particular risks *now* that you should come and tell me what to do, sir? Why, was you to heave the ship to you'd bring something *like* a risk upon us, for should anything draw down suddenly, there'd be no time to get out of the road—to get the vessel under command; we'd be no better than a half-tide rock, just fit to be run into."

"I had no idea you were so nervous, colonel," said Mr. Edwards.

"Nervous! confound it, Edwards, I'm not nervous. I'm farsighted. Don't call looking ahead *nervousness*, hang it!" retorted the colonel. "I want to provide against danger. But there, Captain Pipes, let the matter rest, sir. I'll offer no more advice. You shall do what you please with the ship," and with both hands he fell to curling his moustache.

Hornby, Edwards, and I then struck in, defending Pipes's seamanship, assuring the colonel there was no danger and so forth. Eventually we succeeded in dismissing the skipper, with a tolerably composed face, whilst the colonel repaired to his wife's berth to ascertain what progress she was making in her toilet with the help of her daughter.

After which the three came out, and we stood up to receive Mrs.

Inglefield and to congratulate her upon her recovery. She was dressed with the same tightness I had taken notice of yesterday, but in another costume. This time it was something uncommonly juvenile—blue serge, laced with yellow ladder-like trimmings down the breast ; and you only needed to put the colonel into knickerbockers, and give them each a hoop, to convert them into an advanced couple masquerading as children. She did not look the worse for her sickness. The powder, maybe, on her face concealed such traces as one might expect to notice. Perhaps she had not suffered very severely, but as she stepped out of her cabin, leaning in a kind of album-picture-like pose on her daughter, you saw that she had made up her mind not to be sea-sick for nothing, and that it was her intention to remain interesting for some time. I waited with interest to see how she would comport herself towards Hornby ; but though I ridicule because I disliked her—her artificiality, her make-up, her juvenility, and other unpleasant qualities in a woman whose daughter was old enough to be married and settled—yet she was a lady when it came to such a matter as dealing with Hornby's drunken blunder, and the way in which she met him caused me to think it was a great pity that she should make such a fool of herself in her general conduct.

If ever the colonel had doubted my assurance that Hornby had no recollection of what had happened, he could no longer question the fact. The little fellow's behaviour was quite convincing. No man, however impudent, could have worn the easy manner Hornby carried, could have smiled upon Mrs. Inglefield, congratulated her, bowed and shaken hands as our friend did, had he been sensible of the mistake he had committed on the previous night. So here were we all now supposed to be recovered from seasickness, and certainly nobody complained ; Edwards talked freely and his laugh was tolerably frequent ; Hornby flitted about and seemed to understand the deck, though the dance of the ship was pretty gay ; Mrs. Inglefield, seated at Margaret Edwards's side, looked pensive and smiled wanely ; on the other side was her quiet daughter, answering questions in a low voice, but looking on the whole very well.

But the skylights overhead remained blind with the ashen drizzle, and every bone of the *Silver Sea* creaked again as she drove under her maintop-gallant sail through the damp thickness that overhung the deep.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE SIGHT A SAIL.

THE day passed, as it was bound to do, fair or foul ; we made a long business of lunching just to kill time, though not many of

us ate very heartily. Mrs. Inglefield did not talk much, having an invalid part to play, but the rest of us found plenty to gabble about. The colonel, probably regretting his manner of going on deck and talking to Pipes, spoke to the old skipper in a pleasanter fashion than I should have thought possible in so loud-voiced and heavily-whiskered a man; and the captain, who was a person naturally amiable and very anxious to please, met his military friend more than halfway; so that on the whole that lunch was an agreeable meal, and we protracted it gladly enough in the face of the weather, and the reminder of it that would come now and again in the shape of a smart lashing of the skylight windows, when a bit of a squall came driving along with the mist.

We were a free and easy party, for when lunch was over we men sat smoking at the table, whilst the ladies withdrew to the end of the cabin; though let it be understood that we were not so free and easy but that we took great care, by dint of repeated and earnest inquiries, to learn that there was no fear of Mrs. Inglefield and her daughter being capsized afresh by the fumes of tobacco. It was this freedom and easiness that caused me to hope we should have a jolly time of it after all, spite of the colonel's temper and his wife's posture-making. Our adventure was in reality a marine picnic; and to have shipped the stricter conventions, to have brought with us the severer shore-going restraints, as if the cabin of the *Silver Sea* were a drawing-room in Grosvenor Square, instead of a plain, hearty, salt, bulkheaded interior, would have converted the voyage into a dull, tiresome, and even harassing business.

When we had done with our tobacco, we joined the ladies, first learning from Pipes, who favoured us with the news down the companion, that it (the weather) was still as thick as mud in a wine-glass; and I asked Miss Edwards if she would sing.

"It is almost too soon to sing," said she. "It would be like playing the piano on a see-saw. It would feel very strange, I think, to sing amid all this motion till one got quite used to it."

"Try and imagine, dear," said Mrs. Inglefield, who was lying back with her head cushioned and a smelling-bottle in her hand, "that the movement is merely the ship keeping time to your charming voice."

"A very pretty image—a most poetical fancy," cried little Hornby, giving Mrs. Inglefield a bow.

She looked at her husband, then at me, and dropped her eyes with the air of an embarrassed girl.

"Come, try your hand, Margaret—there's no harm in making the experiment anyway," said Edwards.

Without further fuss she went to the piano. We all looked at her, and I noticed Mrs. Inglefield take her in, with a woman's *sweep of the eye that followed on to her own figure*. Even the colonel stared with his brows wrinkled up, as though he found

something fine and admirable in the stately girl, and was deep in thought over it ; whilst Hornby sprang to his feet and opened the piano, and stood alongside of it, ready to turn the music for her or do anything else she wanted.

It was a tax upon my gravity to contrast the shipowner's little form side by side with the girl's beautiful shape. A man needs a good figure to show up well against a finely-made woman seated at a piano ; for every defect is then accentuated, and long legs never look longer, a thick neck never looks thicker, an ugly face never looks uglier, and awkwardness of posture and movement is never awkwarder than at such a time. Hornby, however, like one or two other little men I have known, did not, at any time of my acquaintance with him, give me reason to think that he considered himself short. He did not wear high heels. When a small man knows he is small, there will be an air of discomfort in him when standing up with a tall man. Hornby never conveyed this impression when conversing with Edwards, who, at such times, appeared big enough to pocket the little chap ; and his going now and posting himself alongside Miss Edwards, who, when seated, was very near to his level, showed an insensibility that a sensitive small man might envy.

However, whilst I was engaged in suppressing my merriment over the figure cut by Hornby at the piano, and wondering what expression his face would take were he to be told of his doings on the previous night, Miss Edwards began to sing (from memory), and in a breath my whole mind went to her voice, and I could think of nothing else. Agreeable as her tones were to hear in conversation, no one would have supposed from them that she was mistress of one of the richest and purest contralto voices probably ever heard in a person who was not a professional singer. I know it is the custom of novelists to make their heroines sing with an art and perfection which are utterly ruinous to the *vraisemblance* of their stories, because one feels that if any woman ever *did* sing like these Violets and Mauds and the rest of them, why, one would have heard of her ; her name would be more familiar than that of Patti or Pasta. But then this is not a novel ; it is a fact ; and I give you my word that Margaret Edwards had as beautiful a voice as was ever heard in an amateur and that she sang with exquisite taste. The moment the rich notes sounded, Hornby and Edwards and the rest of the company, the cabin, the weeping skylights, melted out of existence ; I was alone, listening to a voice incomparable in utterance and in volume of sweetness, and watching the handsome face whence it proceeded, with the eyes brightening and flashing under the inspiration of the lovely notes, and the soft rich cheeks deepening their damask till you would have thought it was the exquisite sensibility you traced in the singing that was shedding its glow there.

"Beautiful!" piped Hornby as she stopped and looked round to us with a smile.

"Beautiful indeed!" said I in a manner that caused Mrs. Inglefield to half close her eyes and fix them on me, whilst Edwards wore a well-pleased look as he leaned forward and stroked his gouty leg.

She would not play or sing again, and, as nobody offered to take her place, the diversion of music was very short-lived indeed. Well, the day slipped along, and the dinner hour found the cabin still gloomy with the wet grey atmosphere without. But all at once, during the progress of the meal, it grew light; you saw the thinnest pinkish haze come flowing through the glass, followed by a clear beam of sunshine that struck into every polished thing a dozen reddish stars, and brightest of all the reflectors among us and in the cabin were the dark eyes of Miss Edwards as she turned them up with an exclamation of pleasure.

Simultaneously with this gush of brightness, one heard the watch on deck making sail. Pipes quitted the table to have a look round, and returned after a few minutes.

"It's clearing up properly," said he. "The drizzle and thickness have gone away into the west'ard, where it looks as mucky as Jarrow mud; but to wind'ard the sky's like a pansy, ladies, which, if my memory serves me correctly, is of an elegant blue, and as the air has the polish of a looking-glass, I think I can promise you a first-class sunset;" and the old fellow, with a cheerful smile turned his square face round upon us, one after another.

"Oh, I hope so!" cried Mrs. Inglefield; "I am *so* fond of fine effects!"

"Out of India," shouted the colonel, "I have never seen a sunset worth looking at. It's the same with storms. You get no lightning in England fit to mention. India's the place for phenomena. Why, hang me, if I haven't seen the sun shining *green* there."

"Lor' now!" exclaimed Pipes.

"Ay, green as grass, by George, sir!"

"After that, Edwards," said Hornby with an incredulous grin, "who's going to prove that the moon *isn't* made of green cheese?"

"D'ye know, I fancied the damp was passing—my arm's better," observed Edwards.

"Oh, how unromantic you are, Mr. Edwards, to talk of your gout when we are thinking of sunsets!" said Mrs. Inglefield, fanning herself. "In which direction will the sun sink, Captain Pipes?"

"In the west, ma'am," replied Pipes, pleased to give information.

"I don't mean that; of *course* the sun sinks in the west," she exclaimed *tittering*. "I mean what side of the ship will it *disappear on*?"

"Oh, beg your pardon, I'm sure," said Pipes with a bit of colour coming into his cheekbones. "On the starboard bow, on the right-hand side."

"Do you know of any poet, Margaret dear," said she, "who has written about sunsets? It would be so nice to hear the lines read aloud whilst the sun sinks."

"Do you think so?" replied Miss Edwards. "I should imagine that all the poetry one wants at such a time is to be found in the sun himself."

"There is one thing, though, that might fitly attend his descent," I remarked, "and make this particular departure of his memorable; and that would be a song from Miss Edwards."

"Oh, Mr. Aubyn," she exclaimed, "just think of any one having the assurance to sing the sun to sleep."

"Tell you what it is, Pipes," exclaimed Hornby; "the sea's growing smoother."

"Right, sir, the sloppiness is diminishing, yet there'll be some weight left in the wind." As the skipper spoke he was hailed through the skylight by the chief mate, who had charge of the deck.

"There looks to be something wrong with that vessel to loo'ard, sir."

"What do you notice? Has she a colour flying?"

"No, sir. So far as I can make out, she appears to be in irons. Yet, though I've been watching, I don't notice that there's any effort made aboard of her to get her out of her mess."

"How will she bear, Mr. Bird?"

"About three points on the lee bow, sir."

"Then keep the ship away a point, or say a point and a half, till I come on deck, and meanwhile see if you can make anything more of her."

All this was so much Greek to Edwards and the colonel and the ladies, and when Mr. Bird lifted his head out of the skylight Mr. Edwards said, "What ship are you talking about, captain?"

"Why," answered Pipes, "when the thickness drew off it left visible a sail—too far away to tell her rig—down to leeward. No uncommon object a sail hereabouts, Mr. Edwards—"

"Yes," interrupted the colonel; "but it's very certain that your mate finds something uncommon in this particular sail."

"What's the meaning of a vessel being in irons?" inquired Miss Edwards.

You cannot puzzle a sailor more than by asking him to define a marine term thoroughly intelligible to him, but familiar only in the form he is asked to translate. Pipes shoved his plate away, and with contracted brows and much deep breathing was beginning to explain with both hands, looking about him for articles wherewith to manufacture diagrams, when to save time I said, "Excuse me,

captain ; isn't a ship in irons when the wind has so got hold of her that she won't cast one way or the other ? ”

“ Why, yes, of course,” he responded, looked relieved. “ That's it, Miss Edwards,” and he pulled his plate back to him.

“ What do you mean by *cast*, Mr. Aubyn ? ” asked Miss Inglefield in her gentle, low voice.

The word signifies turn, doesn't it, captain ? When you say a ship won't cast, Miss Inglefield, you mean that you can't get her head to turn by moving the helm.”

“ That's it,” observed Pipes.

“ What barbarous jargon, to be sure ! ” gushed Mrs. Inglefield. “ To think that the beautiful sea, so rich in poetry as it is, should have inspired such rough and dreadfully ugly words as sailors use.”

“ That's because we're rough and dreadfully ugly ourselves, ma'am,” said Pipes hoarsely, and with a singular grin as if he had a mind to personally confirm his own remark.

“ Curious, now, what can be the matter with that vessel,” said the colonel, revolving a wine-glass. “ Nothing *wrong*, I hope. A wreck, you know, is not a pleasant thing to encounter on the threshold of a jaunt of this kind, by George ! It's like tripping over a corpse, hang it ! A confounded bad omen—though there's no humbugging superstitions about *me*, thank God.”

“ Charley, you're so shocking. You always leap to the most horrible conclusions,” said his wife.

“ Suppose she proves a wreck,” exclaimed Hornby, “ it can't matter. When you walk along the street you pass men with humps, fellows with wooden legs, people in rags, and all that sort of thing, don't you know ; but they don't stop you from getting safe home. The ocean's a great highway, and there's nothing to be met upon it that need be thought ominous. Eh, Miss Edwards ? don't you think I'm right ? Why, the sea would be a very dull affair if it didn't give us something to look at now and then.”

We were all too anxious, however, to get on deck to fall into an argument and linger at the table. There was sunshine in the air, and it courted us, as you may suppose, after our tedious confinement to the cabin. So the ladies went for their hats and shawls, though Mrs. Inglefield had a good deal to say first concerning her doubts as to whether she could walk, and whether the deck would not make her dizzy, and whether she ought not to lie down. Pipes, believing her genuine, exhorted her to quit the cabin for the fresh air ; but the rest of us, seeing a little deeper than the worthy skipper, wasted no words in persuading her to do that which she made up her mind to undertake ; and presently we were all on deck.

The soaking melancholy drizzle that had imprisoned us was

gone. Pipes was quite right ; the windward sky was of a violet blue, though in the west the sun covered the heavens with a yellow mantle of brightness, high as the luminary still was over the water-line. The sea was of a very rich azure ; one might have thought that the thin windy raining all day had cleansed it, of such wonderful purity was its hue. A few large-bosomed clouds sailed slowly into the westwards, their shoulders of a brilliant orange, and their skirts so tinted that they might have passed for wind-galls. The breeze was a pleasant wind, just enough to give a play of froth to the heads of the little seas as they ran and to incline the ship by a strake or so. All plain sail had been made whilst we were at dinner and when the sun shone forth ; so that on reaching the deck we found the *Silver Sea* a crowd of canvas, the yards braced in, the weather clew of the mainsail up, the sails looking like yellow satin as they swelled out towards the sun, whole constellations of golden fiery stars blazing about her decks in the brass work and bright wood where they received the deepening splendour flowing in an ocean of dazzling light out of the leeward sky ; whilst just over the lee cathead, between three and four miles distant, lay the vessel whose appearance had puzzled Mr. Bird.

Pipes picked up the glass, and, going to the rail, steadied the tube against a backstay and took a long look.

"What's the matter with her, captain, do you think?" called out the colonel, who had been busy in getting his wife a chair and attending to her.

"Well," replied Pipes, bringing his eye away from the glass to look towards us, "there can be no question that she's in some kind of mess. She's a small barque, ladies and gentleman ; her flying jibboom's missing, and I think that the sail belonging to it is that white object there close to the dolphin striker. She's kind of hove to, her maintopsail shaking, and her fore yards aback."

"Is not that another ship out there, beyond her, Mr. Aubyn?" said Miss Edwards.

I peered and answered, "Yes : apparently heading our way. You have excellent sight."

"Miss Edwards has the finest eyes of any lady in this world," observed little Hornby, overhearing us.

It would have been impossible not to agree with the shipowner. A smile hovered on her lips as she sent a dark and sparkling glance at the distant sail she had descried. The steward was desired to bring binocular glasses and telescopes ; and, armed with a small but powerful glass of my own, I crossed the deck to inspect the vessel we were heading for.

She was, as Pipes had said, a little barque, painted black ; she had a fine air of confusion. I could not see any boats at the davits, and there was no appearance of anything living being aboard. A little to the left of her was the ship Miss Edwards had noticed,

hull down. I brought the telescope to bear upon her, then turned to Mr. Bird, who was standing near me.

"Just look at that sail yonder with this glass."

He did so.

"Is not she in a mess too, think you, Mr. Bird?"

"Why, yes, for a very plain reason," said he, still peering.

"She's lost her foretopmast. She's a full-rigged ship. Surely she's all aback, like the barque, isn't she?"

"I don't see how that could be otherwise; for she's lying right athwart our hawse with her nose in the wind's eye."

"Well, if they're *both* in a mess it'll be strange," said the mate; and he went and spoke to Pipes, who at once examined the farther ship.

It was not long before the colonel spied the vessel also; and I was much amused to watch him screwing himself up against the lee rigging and inspecting both vessels through an extremely long thin telescope. He kept one eye closed with his fingers; his right hand held the glass; and you saw his hairy profile clear against the amber over the horizon, a cheroot in his mouth, and the end of the telescope working like a see-saw when the object slipped out of the lens and he dodged about to recover it. Edwards, on the other hand, with his legs hoisted up and a rug over them, enjoyed his cigar and asked no questions.

CHAPTER XV.

WE HAIL A DERELICT.

OUR ship at this hour made the prettiest picture one could wish to see. It was the second dogwatch, and the seamen were clustered forwards, smoking and yarning and looking at the barque we were nearing. The sun was still within an hour of his setting, but every minute the glory in the west was gathering a richer tint, and the golden brightness in the sky and the brassy dazzle rising off the water fell upon the *Silver Sea* and bathed her in the lovely summer evening tint that is met with only in perfection on the deep, where the broad bosom of the waters lies bare to whatever of gloom or splendour the heavens may look down upon it with. The western light went gleaming and paling into the east whence the blue billows came, and whilst under our lee bends the foam seethed past as yellow as sand, over the weather side it was like milk in white brightness. On high every curve of the full sails beyond the bolt-ropes wore the lustrous sulphurous tinge, looking as it did *sunwards*; but the concavities had a bluish shadow as if the violet of

the east found its reflection in them, or as if the wind flashed into them with an azure dye in its breath and left them stained with that hue. The ocean at this time seemed measureless. I had never before beheld the horizon take a character so remote; it seemed thirty miles off, and the gleaming liquid field we were sailing in had something of the spaciousness of the dome overhead.

Every trace of sea-sickness had vanished from among our little company of pleasure-seekers. Mr. Hornby fell into conversation with Mrs. Inglefield, and I was pleased to see how completely that lady had dismissed from her mind all thoughts of last night's unfortunate incident; Miss Margaret and Miss Agnes chatted together; the colonel eyed the vessels ahead; Mr. Edwards and I talked about gout and medical specialists; Pipes strutted here and there, and the man at the wheel, with the sunset glare striking off the brass binnacle hood on to his face, steered us straight through the pleasant summer evening.

Before long we were close enough to the barque to have her clear to the bare eye, and it was not only perfectly evident now that she was deserted, but that she was sinking. *That* was made plain by the appreciable settling of her stern in the water, the rise of her bows, and the unmistakable sickly swaying of the whole fabric. Even in drowning a ship still seems a thing of instinct. There is a loud sobbing in her heart, her movements grow weaker, and she appears to strangle as she sinks, just as one of her own sailors might. It gave one a kind of shock to see the vessel sluggishly heaving on the yellow swell, slowly being sucked down by the sea, with the glory of the descending sun upon her, and her rigging like gold wire and her sails of a steam-like tint against the flush that was burning and darkening into crimson over the water.

I read in small white letters *Jean Marie* upon her name-board, past which was the white figure of a woman represented to the waist, with face and arms raised.

"It might pass for the spirit of the vessel imploring heaven's mercy on the brink of its ocean-grave," said I to Miss Edwards, calling attention to the figure-head.

"She is really sinking, then?" she exclaimed.

"Fast," said I.

A startled light gleamed in her eyes as she looked again at the barque. There is a mystery and dread in the spectacle of a foundering ship that might well thrill such a heart as this girl's. Even the painting of a craft that is going to the bottom will detain many a spectator and quicken the pulse in him too. But when you come upon the reality as we did; behold the greatness of the grave into which the vessel is descending; mark her helplessness and loneliness, and the uncompassionating flaming sky, and miss in the bright

summer evening and the pleasant crisping sea the reconciling sympathy you would find in nature for such an object in weeping clouds and a desolate foaming ocean ; why, then you may understand and forgive in yourself a little passage of agitation, of mis-giving, ay, and even of depression.

"What do you make of that business, captain?" asked Hornby.

"Well, sir," replied Pipes, "it's been puzzling me, but I reckon I see it clear enough now. It's a case of collision ; whether yonder craft," said he, pointing to the further sail, "is in it too, I can't yet say ; but from the looks of her I should fancy that she is. If I'm right, then the job's been this : those two vessels have been foul of each other ; the crew of the barque, finding her sinking, have got aboard the ship, though," he added, levelling his glass once more at the further vessel, "if she's got men in her, it seems uncommonly strange that they don't turn to and trim the yards and head her one way or the other. Ever since we sighted her she's been lying to as she still is."

"I was laughed at," cried the colonel in a loud voice, "when I recommended caution in thick weather. But there, ladies and gentlemen, *there*," he shouted, pointing to the barque with all his might as if he were thrusting some heavy thing away from him, "is an argument in support of my views that, by George ! ought to render it unnecessary for me to say a word more on the subject of care—of *care*, Hornby, for the rest of the voyage."

"I hope it will render it unnecessary, I am sure, sir," said Pipes.

"Captain," exclaimed Mr. Edwards, who, being entirely a landsman in taste and views, seemed the least interested of us by the spectacle we were contemplating, "if that vessel there is sinking it's to be hoped there's nobody in her. How do you know there is nobody on board?"

"Why," answered Pipes, "first of all, sir, there's nobody visible, which wouldn't be the case, I take it, if there was any one to show himself. Then, you see, she's got no boats and the falls are overhauled to the water's edge, which is a very good proof that her people have left her. But we'll hail her as we pass. We'll be near enough to see her decks as she rolls, and she's not going to sink yet."

"Oh, how fearful it would be if there was any one on board when the vessel sank!" cried Mrs. Inglefield, clasping her hands and giving them a girlish toss, "particularly if he couldn't swim."

"Ought not we to make sure if there is the least doubt?" said Miss Edwards.

"Oh, there's nobody on board ; Pipes would know," exclaimed Hornby. "As he says, if anybody were left he'd get up and show *himself*, and wave his hat and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

Meanwhile our helm had been shifted to enable us to run down under the barque's stern. She was now so close that you could hear the flap of her canvas as the cloths swung into and out from the masts. Her injury was probably on the lee bow, as there were no signs of anything being wrong with her to windward. Her flying jibboom was gone, and the wrench of the stay had broken the royalmast just above the topgallant masthead, though the spar was kept erect by the backstays. The flying jib trailed in the water from the jibboom that had received a blow heavy enough to start and twist the cap, otherwise she was undamaged aloft. As we drew near, our crew forward and ourselves aft crowded to the side to look at her. Of all melancholy marine pictures I can recollect nothing sadder; but what undoubtedly made it so was the golden summer beauty of the sun-flushed evening. Overhead was the faint film of the crescent moon contending with the airy haze of pinkish splendour that overflowed the sky into the far east. The sun was now low, and was a great pool of throbbing blood-red light amid the massive folds of crimson hove up by its ardent burning. North and south stretched this magnificent extent of fiery ruby light, and the water beneath was rose-red for leagues with a horizon perfectly defined all the way round, clear as glass, even where the burning glory of the setting orb was showering down into it, and nothing broke the red and gleaming monotony of the liquid girdle but the motionless, apparently helpless, ship that lay some distance beyond the barque. The lustre, which was like that which you get from molten ore, took the heads of the swell as it rolled and came sliding from one brow to another from the west through the breaks of orange-coloured foam that curled in feathery bendings towards the sun, till the wild and angry glory brought the eye to the lonely crippled vessel, whose helm-port under the counter was now flush with the water, and whose lifted bow was showing strips of green sheathing that gave it a sickly look.

We ran down under her stern, so close that I believe a cable's length would have spanned us, and as there was nothing but a bit of a wheel-house aft, we got a good sight of her decks from our superior height and owing to the posture in which she lay. It was but a glimpse, for we passed swiftly; yet the sharp eager glance I threw in my anxiety to mark if there was anything alive on board, gave me most of the details photographically, and I clearly recall the bright masts, the two white scuttle-butts on the port side, a winch abaft the mainmast, the windlass showing dark under the foresail, the blocks of the davit tackles dipping as the vessel rolled, a pump with the brake stuck up as though jammed; and chiefly do I remember the oppressive silence her deck *suggested*, for, to write like an Irishman, there was no *hearing* it on account of the sounds made by our own ship.

Pipes jumped on to a rail and held by a backstay as we passed, and we were all as still as death, staring with straining eyes.

"Barque ahoy!" he roared in a voice fit to penetrate twenty fathoms under water. You heard the creaming of foam along the sides of our vessel, the flapping of the barque's sail, and the moaning and chafing in her rigging and ours. The mate, conning the *Silver Sea*, ordered the helm to be put down, and we rounded under the stern of the sinking vessel whilst thrice Pipes hailed her in a hurricane note, and some of our men sprang into the foreshrouds to look down on her decks, and make sure that she was abandoned, as far as the eye could tell.

Of this there could be no doubt; whether the crew were aboard the other ship remained to be discovered; that this Frenchman was derelict was as certain as that she was sinking. In a few minutes she was rolling with sodden sickly motion in our wake, and we were standing for the other ship, with the sun like a mountain of red-hot steel on the sea-line and draining its fires into the deep, and the sky to right over our mastheads a motionless plain of brick-red light, terribly grand to behold for the immensity of it, and then paling into yellow as it swept down the arch on our left till it grew as green as a spring leaf over the sea there.

I can tell you it was an overpowering sunset to sail under with that barque sinking astern. One saw a bronzed face here and there forward staring up as though the man had been hailed from aloft, and then looking at the barque, and afterwards at the ship we were heading for, and gnawing a tobacco junk until the movement of the muscles was visible from the quarter deck. Those among us who had occupied chairs resumed their seats—for even Edwards had got up to look at the Frenchman as we passed—and the colonel rattled out:

"You all now see what a collision is. It's a dreadful kind of accident. A man oughtn't to be considered nervous for providing against it, by Jingo!"

"Did you notice where she was damaged, captain?" I asked.

"Her stem-piece was started, sir; she'll be drawing in the water through the Lord alone knows how many hoo-den ends," answered the old fellow with a solemn face, as though he were speaking of a drowning fellow-creature.

"What a horrible thing shipwreck must be!" exclaimed Mrs. Ingfield. "I would rather die at once than be tossed about in an open boat."

She shuddered, and I fancy her shudder was real this time, for she had her eye on one of our quarter-boats as she spoke.

"Not when it came to the point," said little Hornby briskly, and rubbing his hands. "Self-preservation is an astonishingly powerful instinct, I assure you."

"If shipwreck would cure the gout, I wouldn't at all mind

spending a day or two in an open boat," exclaimed Mr. Edwards.

"Look here, Edwards!" shouted the colonel, looking uncomfortable; "hang it all, don't let us talk of open boats. If nothing short of *that* is going to cure you, then I must beg to be put ashore, with my wife and daughter, without delay."

"There'll be no open boats this bout, sir," exclaimed Pipes heartily. "I've been thirty-five year at sea, and have only been shipwrecked four times, and that gives you an average of nigh nine years to pass upon the ocean without danger."

Meanwhile, Miss Edwards kept silence, watching the wonderful glory in the west, her eyes on fire with the effulgence that dyed us all crimson and that flung a rosy haze upon the ship, through which you saw gleams of a carmine hue glancing from the brass-work and glass, though the sun was gone. Miss Inglefield was listening to the conversation, and no one I think but I noticed Miss Edwards's deep abstraction. It was a lovely study. The mood in her made her face exquisitely pensive; the wind stirred her hair upon her brow, she breathed softly yet deeply, with parted lips, and her bosom rose and fell as a sleeper's. She broke away from her thoughts, whatever they were, with a kind of sigh, and looked straight at me, just as a person often will at one who watches him intently. I felt a trifle of colour come into my face at this sudden detection which had given me no time to turn my glance from her.

"I hope," said she to me, "that we shall find the poor people who belonged to that barque safe on board the other ship."

"I am afraid we shan't," said I.

"Why do you say that, Aubyn?" exclaimed Edwards.

"Because I think she's abandoned."

"That's my notion too," said Pipes, taking up a telescope.

"Well, hang me, if I like these incidents," growled the colonel.

"Little dramatic experiences, quite *ong raygul*, and signifying nothing at all so far as we are concerned, I assure you," piped Hornby. "It's quite proper that the monotony of the sea should be relieved. We want to be interested, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, to prevent the voyage from growing tedious."

"I hope we shan't meet with a drowned body," said Mrs. Inglefield fanning herself, though the wind was cool and comfortable. "I am certain such a sight would make me hysterical. I don't feel quite well yet."

The strong glow at the end of the colonel's cigar betrayed his feelings more forcibly than had he bawled out. He was indeed

smoking with tremendous energy, expelling great clouds and letting fly at them with his hand.

"Oh, mamma, don't talk of drowned bodies!" said Miss Inglefield.

"If your mother *can* make an uncomfortable suggestion she'll not spare you," exclaimed the colonel.

This caused Mrs. Inglefield to look at her husband with an expression of surprise and resentment; and for some moments they quarrelled with their eyes. Then the lady assumed an air of disdain, as if, though she was sorry for it, she really couldn't help pitying Charley, and in a weak voice asked Mr. Edwards what o'clock it was. The old gentleman handed the question on to Hornby, not choosing to exert a gouty hand in pulling out his watch.

The rich light was dimming rapidly, the sea in the opposite quarter was coming out dark in a liquid indigo line against the sky there where a few stars trembled, and the barque astern turned grey and shadowy in the tender gloom that crept along, one could not tell from where.

"If there is nobody in that ship, where will the men be?" asked Miss Edwards.

"Pulling away for their lives, Miss, somewhere or other, if they're not picked up, though in what direction it's impossible to say," replied Pipes, overhearing the question and casting his eyes round the sea as though he would be glad to be able to point out the boats to her.

The breeze slightly freshened when the sun went, and the slip of moon whitened into silver as the after-glow dimmed off sea and sky. I had another good look at the ship ahead whilst there was yet light to see her by. She was "all in the wind," as the phrase is, canvas shivering, bowsprit gone at the gammoning, jibs and stay-sails overboard with the booms, mainsail hauled up, and all the braces fore and aft slack as a watch-chain. A sort of dim spark would come off her decks as she rolled, and when I first saw it I fancied a pistol was exploded aboard of her as a signal, till the sheen of glass caught my eye and explained the cause of that glitter. She showed no colours, and though I could see her square stern and the swell of her topsides with a narrow chequered band under the chains, I could not make out her name. Whilst the orange light was in the sky she came out clear, the tints of her hull and spars and sails visible in the radiance that streamed out of the east's reflection of the sunset; but when the Oriental lustre faded, whilst the pale western glow was still beyond the ship, there was a minute when she stood black as a sketch in India-ink. Miss Edwards started up from her chair to look, and I posted myself *alongside of her* as she overhung the lee rail, gazing with the rapt *ardent expression* that any object of beauty would put into her eyes.

"It is like a piece of black needlework on yellow satin," said she.

It was a woman's fancy, and as pretty and as exact as need be. The sails, the hull, the spars of the vessel might have passed for a piece of carving in jet; every rope and yardarm and masthead lay in exquisitely clear fine black strokes upon the illuminated background, and there hung the ship as though she were a Chinese toy in ebony wood, heaving softly upon the water, whilst the shadow of the night went creeping down to her and along the heavens, transforming the blue of the ocean into a dark grey, and bringing out a sort of pearly glimmer from the vessel's sails.

"What should there be in darkness to give the sea the mystery it takes at night?" said Miss Edwards in the voice of one thinking aloud. "And what a sense of mystery, too, the ocean at night excites in one! In the daylight nothing could have been realer than that ship; and now she becomes a phantom, as much so as if she were centuries old and had risen from the sand that her crew might behold the young moon;" and she threw back her head and looked straight up at the sky.

"The reason the sea is mysterious at night is because its extremities are hidden, and that causes its bigness to appeal to the imagination; otherwise, it's just the same at night as it is in the day—salt, and round, and all that sort of thing, don't you know," exclaimed the voice of little Hornby.

I had no idea he was near us, and the suddenness with which Miss Edwards turned proved her ignorance too.

"Yes, Mr. Hornby, that is the reason, no doubt," said she gravely, and then uttered some commonplace and moved quietly away from the rail.

I was rather annoyed by Hornby's intrusion. The girl was in a delightful mood, pensive and tender, and I should have much enjoyed a poetical chat with her, if only for the sake of the subtle sentiment that gets mixed up in imagery and fancies and allusions to nature when the stars are shining, and the two who converse are male and female, and the place is a lonely part of a ship's deck, with a glimpse of foam spinning white and sleek into the gloom that is full of the ashen outlines of billows. But Hornby's presence was fatal to fine thinking. He was more obnoxious indeed to poetical moods than even the colonel, because the military man's mind was a bit of colourless matter-of-fact, incapable of saying anything to deaden a good idea or to give it a ridiculous side; whereas Hornby was a rather poetical man, and therefore unspeakable in that sense.

He followed her across the deck to where the others were, and I walked aft, telescope in hand, to have a farewell look at the barque in our wake.

CHAPTER XVI.

WE SEND A BOAT.

THE evening lay in a fine clear darkness astern, the white stars plentiful and bright. The *Silver Sea* was reeling off a fair six knots, and a wide stream of froth poured out from under her stern towards the moon's wake, but the crescent was yet too faint to do more than give a pallider look to the foam that ran under it. The sea had a cold, weltering appearance, despite the fair, warm night. A chill came off it that was not to be met by an overcoat; and as the head of a surge ran with a yearning gush of foam out of the gloom to the ship, and fell short and melted into a sheet of seething white that was upborne like a floating shroud by the foaming billow, I thought that, let the weather be what it would over the ocean—hot, if you like, as the shadowless equator—it was but a bitter cold grave a drowned man would find in the silent heart of the vast and restless shadow I was looking at.

I peered into the darkness over the taffrail for the barque, and, not seeing her, raised the glass to my eye, and searched afresh. I swept the sea-line from our starboard to our port quarter, guessing if she were not in that field she would be nowhere; but no blotch to represent her or any other vessel that way rose between the lens and the stars which winked into the telescope all along and just above the horizon.

"She's foundered," said I aloud, though to myself, and not without a sort of consternation, for I had made sure of seeing her, and this evanishment was a kind of shock in its way.

"There's na doot about that, sir," said a voice, and I found the second mate, Mr. Semple, at my elbow.

"Upon my word," I exclaimed, "a man should be able to sympathize with nervous people who think the ocean but a perilous playground, when he looks along its surface for a ship, visible but a few minutes before, and finds the frothing platform as bare as the sky."

"Ay; the sea's got a maw ye'll not find in the land," answered the second mate gravely; "when a mon dees ashore there's a mark put up, the sexton mak's a moond over him, ony way ye knaw where he is, and feel that at ony moment, by digging, ye'd coom across what's left of him. But it's different with the sea, sir. When a mon sinks he's moor gone than had he been turned into smoke and blown away by a gale of wind. Where's that barque noo? Ye may follow her in fancy, if you like, sotling down into *the water there*. But thot's not it; she might ha' been fule of *people—'twould ha' been arle the same*. There's a score of heeds

of froth where she went doon ; but there's nowt under God's eye," said he, with a glance aloft, "to show you where she made a hool, and the surface remains the same as when the Laird created the earth—ay, an' it would remain the same if every ship upon this globe was to founder, and tak' doon every sailor mon alive at the present time."

"Well," said I, struck by such fancies as these in a plain merchantman, and not a little impressed by the pulpitical twang and rattle of his north-country notes, "One thing is quite certain ; wherever else she may be, she not afloat."

Just then the colonel, with his wife upon his arm, came along.

"Is that you, Aubyn ?" he shouted, halting to windward of the wheel and peering over the spindle at me.

"Yes," said I.

"What have you been looking at ? anything wrong ? anything in sight ?"

"I have been trying to find out where the barque is ; as she has disappeared, Mr. Semple and I have concluded that she has foundered."

"There's na' doot of it," said the second mate.

"Well, this is a pretty state of things !" cried the colonel. "Barque gone down, do you say ? A pleasant omen, by Jupiter ! I say, Edwards !" he roared, "do you know that the vessel behind us has sunk ?"

"Has she, indeed ?" sang back Mr. Edwards in the tone of a man who is perfectly comfortable and does not want to be bothered.

Pipes came rolling aft to have a look.

"D'ye see anything of her ?" cried the colonel to him.

The old chap peered and peered and then said, "No, she's gone. She was more in a hurry than I thought."

"She's gone, do you say ?" demanded the colonel.

"Ay, she's gone."

"Well, confound it all, this is a beastly thing to happen, right under one's nose—damn it !" bawled the colonel. "Why, in the name of heaven, do you want to put us in the way of these accidents, Captain Pipes ? shoving your ship into the thick of them. Hang it ! even now you're aiming for the other vessel, as if we had formed a party for the purpose of going to sea in search of horrors."

"Anything but a drowned body for me, please, Captain Pipes," said Mrs. Inglefield, languishingly. "I am far from being a brave woman, Mr. Aubyn."

"There's no need to talk of drowned bodies, ma'am," responded Pipes. "You may navigate the ocean for years and never come across such an object. As to my putting you in the way of these disasters, colonel, you've seen how it came about, as well as the

other ladies and gentlemen. There may be a chance of saving life in running down to have a look at a craft knocking about like that there chap ahead of us ; and I hope there's no living creature about the *Silver Sea* as would object to the rescuing of a fellow-being in distress."

"Oh, that's all very well ; and if there's a fellow-being in distress, I hope he may be rescued—confound it !" cried the colonel. "But what I say is, if we're to call ourselves a party of pleasure, there's no use in you, as captain of this ship, steering us into unpleasant sights and making us gloomy with deucedly unpleasant reflections. Eh, Aubyn ? Pipes is no fool, but I don't see how he's going to answer *that*. What should I say if a friend asked me to a ball, and on my arriving led me into a family vault, and begged me to interest myself in skulls and dust ? By Gad, I must tell Edwards that. Hang me if that's not a simile worth repeating." And away he stumped with his wife on his arm to the group at the other end of the quarter-deck.

"He's the most nervous gentleman I ever had to do with !" exclaimed Pipes. "Timid ! why, if a baby was to make a face at him, he'd run away and hide himself."

"He has suffered much from his liver ; and the liver you know, plays Old Harry with the nerves," said I.

"How comes such a man as him in a fighting calling, sir ? I never had much respect for soldiers myself ; but I've usually found them with courage, anyhow. But here's a military officer frightened by an abandoned ship going down."

"Captain, you must take no notice of him, except to laugh at him, as I and the others do. I suppose we shall be fetching that derelict soon—if she should prove to be abandoned."

I went to the side, and, past the curve of the mainsail, saw the ship lying about a mile ahead of us. The narrow strip of moon and the stars threw out among them light enough to shed a faintness of white upon the sea, and the ship in it was a dull pale shadow. Pipes said to the second mate, "There's been nothing like a signal of any kind shown. She'll be abandoned, as sure as my head's in my cap. But we'll give her a good chance ; so get the mainsail hauled up, Mr. Semple, and let some hands stand by the mizzen-tops'l braces and back the yards that we may pass her slowly."

I walked to where Mr. Edwards was sitting, whilst the watch came over to the main clew garnets.

"This is the sort of thing to make the time fly at sea," cried Hornby. "We require at least one excitement every day."

"Why are the sailors pulling up that sail ?" inquired Miss Edwards.

"*That we may not pass the ship too rapidly,*" I replied.

"*Suppose Pipes should run into her !*" shouted the colonel.

"Eh, Hornby? Nothing more like to happen with a man who *will* go mousing about among wrecks."

"Then we must vie with one another to distinguish ourselves, and all that sort of thing, don't you know," replied Hornby. "For example, my ambition would be to cover myself with glory by preserving the life of Miss Edwards."

"You're free from gout, Hornby. But don't talk of glory to me," said Edwards. "There's no covering one's self with anything in accidents at sea. In fact, I think it is the rule for people to uncover themselves at such times."

"Here comes the ship!" exclaimed Miss Inglefield in her quiet voice.

She was close to windward, and went rolling and slewing past us very slowly in consequence of the backed mizzen-topsail yards deadening our vessel's way. She was three hundred tons bigger than the *Silver Sea*, and her high freeboard and tall bulwarks made her look a complete lump of a craft in the gloom.

"Hark! what is that?" cried Miss Edwards.

It was the tolling of a bell that had apparently got fixed in some fashion so as to allow the tongue or clapper to strike the sides with every roll of the wreck. It was a strange and mournful sound to come out of the deep shadow which the ship's hull made upon the dusk of the night there. We passed her so close to leeward that her yardarms and ours appeared almost to come together. Pipes may have wanted to frighten the colonel or to leave himself in no doubt as to the vessel being abandoned; but, be his reason what it would, I was not a little eased when our helm was put over and the big craft was on our quarter. The skipper hailed her with all his might, but the only answer he got was the dreary tolling and the echo of his own voice floating back out of the ship's canvas. She was in ballast, and rolled as light vessels will; hence a constant slapping sound of ropes and sails came from her masts, along with the chafing of blocks and chains and the creaking of timbers, and the splashing, and slopping, and frothing of water under her stern and along her sides; and through all this flowed the dying notes of the bell.

"It is rung by no mortal hand, anyway," said I.

"It's a deuced unpleasant funereal noise to listen to," exclaimed the colonel.

"Who's ringing it?" asked his wife.

"A ghost, no doubt," said Edwards.

"Upon my word, it *is* depressing," said Hornby. "If the ship was full of life, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, it would sound rather nice; but coming from an empty vessel and nobody doing it—"

Here Pipes arrived to tell us that she was abandoned like the other, and probably leaking. "Though her crew," said he, "don't

seem to have given her much of a chance ; for they must have gone away hours ago, to judge of our seeing nothing of them, and the vessel is high enough out of the water to prove that by pumping she might have been kept afloat till the nearest port was made, and *that's* not fur off. But, ladies and gentlemen, for what goes on at sea there's no accounting."

Whilst the old fellow jabbered away, I was staring at the abandoned craft, impressed by the picture she made, though it was the pathos in it, the sense of her loneliness that you got by looking, the feeling that she was bound down to the dark sands beneath us, that gave the marine night scene its chief poetry. By her being to windward she sent the notes of her bell to us along the wind in a kind of thin, shivering sound, like the tremble in the end of a tone emitted by a silver wire when twanged, which the imagination heard long after the ear was deaf to it. The curl of moon over her, and the yeasty glare of foam in the darkness on the water, and her ashen canvas, like some sheeted spectre sliding athwart the great liquid desolate plain of the deep, and the dance of the stars on either hand of her, as she rolled her pallid fabric of spar and sail in and out of them, converted her into a picture fit to muse upon whilst she lingered ; and I was staring and thinking and trying to fit her with a story, understanding pretty well that the two vessels had been in collision, and abandoned by their crews, for reasons they would doubtless be able to explain, if they came off with their lives, when on a sudden there was an unmistakable *thud* forward—the feel of a smart blow struck upon the ship's bow, followed by a shout from a hand on the forecastle, though I did not hear what he said.

"We've knocked against something ! I *knew* it would happen !" roared the colonel at the top of his voice.

"It'll be a bit of wreckage !" cried Pipes, as he and the second mate floundered to the ship's side to look, whilst I bent over the rail, finding Miss Edwards on one hand and Hornby on the other.

"I see it !" cried the girl. "It is a large dark mass !" and as she spoke there came bumping and scraping along the bends of the ship what looked to me to be a vessel's longboat, bottom up ; and floating close to it was the body of a man. The moon was on our side, and that gave us the glimpse we caught of the thing, and, a bit of white water washing past the figure, threw it out as the glimmer of a dim lamp would, whilst a gleam, snatched from God knows what, came off the wet planks of the boat as it lifted a moment like the back of a porpoise, and passed with a squattering *sough* into our wake.

"Anybody see what it was ?" yelled Pipes.

"There's a lump of something black goin' astarn, sir !" sung out the fellow at the wheel.

I heard the skipper tell Mr. Semple to sound the well, though he

never meant *that* order to reach our ears, and he was rolling aft to look at what the helmsman had seen, before it passed out of sight, when little Hornby cried :

"Captain, there's a man's body made fast to the object we struck."

Mrs. Inglefield shrieked : "There now ! the very sight I begged to escape. Charley, take me downstairs—take me downstairs instantly, sir."

If this were affectation it was capitally simulated. She ran to her husband, caught his arm, and bundled him away to the companion, whilst Pipes called out :

"A man's body ? why, he may be alive, Mr. Hornby. Better heave the ship to and send a boat." And at the top of his voice he shouted to the watch to lay aft to the main braces.

"Are you sure it was a man's body ?" said Mr. Edwards, throwing his cigar overboard.

"Cocksure," answered Hornby.

"I saw it, papa," exclaimed Miss Edwards, speaking with an awed voice, her figure erect, her hand grasping a backstay, and the sheen of the glittering heavens in her eyes as she sent her glance into the gloom over the stern.

"There's no life in him, though," said I. "I'm sure of that."

Miss Inglefield came up to Miss Edwards and put her arm into the other's.

Meanwhile, the helm had been shifted and the watch on deck, tumbling aft, were hauling on the weather main braces. In a few minutes the *Silver Sea* was lying without way upon her, with a sharp noise of the running waters pattering against her sides, but with everything quiet aloft in the grasp of the wind, though the reeling of the moon over the mizzen-topsail yardarm was evidence that there was swell enough under-running the pale shapes of the surges to force our masts to keep time to the inaudible music that the dark folds swang through the ocean's heart. Three hands jumped into one of the lee quarter boats, and you saw the rugged form of Mr. Semple in the stern-sheets shipping the rudder as the boat slowly sank from the arching point of the davits. The bearings of the object the men were in quest of had been taken and the distance was but short ; yet I don't think any of us felt over-comfortable when the boat shoved off and in a minute or two was scarcely to be distinguished from the dusky curves of water that paled into a fringe of foam as they ran aslant of the moon's course. The wind swept with a wail in it out of the misty weather starlight, and though it was balmy enough, yet you seemed to find a chill in it *then* from the sound of the spattering of spray and the seething of foam you heard in it. Indeed, this heaving to brought the chilly ocean strangely close to the senses, nearer than ever it could approach a man aboard a vessel sliding over it ; it was like

dropping the weapon that kept some wild beast at respectful distance from you and feeling its breath on your cheek in the gloom.

The deserted ship lay a long way to windward ; she needed some intent looking at to descry her ; though when seen and thought of as sinking out there with the bell on her deck sounding her dirge, and then when the mind came to the body in the darkness between, the sea took so desolate a character—there was something so unreal, so cold, so mournful in the liquid jetty line of it against the sky with pale luminaries feebly twinkling beyond it—that, upon my word, it made conversation with one's fellow-creatures a sort of necessity, and the thoughts of a cheerful cabin and a glass of grog a real relief.

"A pretty look-out now if that boat upsets and drowns the men," said Mr. Edwards. "Can you see her, Hornby?"

"Why, no, I can't say I do ; but she's perfectly safe—no fear of her upsetting, Edwards."

"Did you see the body, Margaret?" asked Miss Inglefield.

"Quite plainly, dear."

"How dreadful !" cried the girl, and, though it was not to be noticed, one *felt* the shudder she gave.

"I say, Edwards," shouted the colonel, coming out of the cabin and bawling the moment he had his head through the companion : "this sort of thing is confoundedly queer *pleasuring*, isn't it? If the gout's to be cured by running dangerously close to sinking vessels, striking against half-submerged objects, and examining dead bodies, all I can say is the prescription's a deuced nasty one, by George !"

"It's all right, colonel," exclaimed Edwards. "*Don't* bother now, my dear fellow. Try one of these cigars, and endeavour to enjoy the sea as I am, by finding something exciting in everything that happens."

The colonel without answering took a cigar and lighted it at Hornby's ; and it was laughable to watch them bobbing at each other, the little chap on tiptoe and the colonel stooping his hairy face as though, like a bull, he meant to heave the shipowner overboard with a toss of his head.

Presently a man came aft with a big globular lamp and stationed himself on the quarter with the light in his hand. The yellow lustre tinged the fellow, and his rough figure and pale face stood out against the darkness like the sketch of a seaman drawn on black canvas with a pencil dipped in phosphorescent light ; it shone dimly, too, on the helmsman holding by one hand to a spoke to steady the wheel and looking seawards, and on Pipes standing up on the rail and grasping the gaff-vang, and on the great wan *space of the spanker* that carried the eye up to the delicate tracery *of rigging alive with the floating and swaying spangles of the stars.*

‘How long is the boat likely to be away, Pipes?’ cried Hornby.

‘Not many minutes, sir. The object’s not a quarter of a mile off, and it’ll be visible enough to them afore they’re close to it,’ answered the skipper.

‘Who saw the corpse?’ demanded the colonel fretfully and in a raven note.

‘I did for one,’ I replied.

‘It *was* a corpse, I suppose?’

‘It was a man’s body, and a corpse, I believe.’

‘All this sort of thing’s a mistake, Edwards,’ cried the military man. ‘Why, hang it all; this is not voyaging for health. It’s body-snatching, I call it. If we’re to stop the ship to examine every dead thing we meet, who’s to tell me we shall ever get home? eh, Hornby? Why, by George! I’ve been towed up the Hooghly through swarms of dead blacks; but who’d dream of dropping anchor in order to examine the deuced unpleasant crowd, one by one, as they floated by? yet that promises to be the rule here.’

‘No, no,’ responded Hornby. ‘Pipes thought the body we passed might be alive; and as Christians and gentlemen and humane people, and all that sort of thing, don’t you know,’ he added warmly, ‘it was our duty to make sure that the poor fellow’s dead before leaving him tossing about on the sea.’

‘Captain Pipes would have acted cruelly had he not sent a boat,’ said Miss Edwards, with a touch of indignation in her voice.

The colonel half-smothered up some military blessing he invoked upon the head of Pipes, and fell to stumping about the decks, glaring aloft, then at the sea, then into the standard compass, whilst he sucked at his cigar with all his might.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE FIND A MAN AND LOSE ONE.

THE time passed and we chatted, but not very gaily, and when after a pretty long interval the minutes went by without giving us a sign of the boat, we fell silent, and I, for one, grew a little anxious. Now and again the man who held the lamp would raise and swing it. As the moon veered westwards she seemed to draw the sprinkling light that had flowed from her up into her own dimming silver, and imperceptibly a deeper shade came over the water, and the topmast sails, which were before visible, melted into the gloom. Still it was a fine clear night—no sea on that, to use a sailor’s phrase, *the smallest boat* “need take the least notice of”—and the

Silver Sea would be plain enough to her men out upon the water, even had no light been shown.

"What's keeping them, captain?" exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "Are they in sight?"

"I don't see the boat, sir; but she can't be far off," responded Pipes, dismounting from the rail. "Better give Mr. Semple a signal of recall perhaps. Some second mates have *too much* zeal, as you may be aware, Mr. Hornby;" and he stepped to the companion and called to the steward.

What he meant to do was not quite clear; but he presently made his intentions known by returning and discharging a double-barrelled gun into the air. The red flames gushed as he let fly each charge, one after the other, like a postman's knock: and the explosions were so noisy that one could have sworn it was an old bell-mouthed blunderbuss he had fired. Edwards hopped off his chair with surprising alacrity; it was as if the detonation had cured his gout; Miss Inglefield uttered a cry; and the colonel ran below to his wife, who, seated in the cabin, had instantly followed the explosions with several piercing screams with a view, possibly, of giving a proper significance to the noise.

"I say, Pipes," shouted Hornby, "for God's sake, man, no more of that—at least give us notice first. You've frightened Mrs. Inglefield into fits."

"I must have the boat back—I must have her back, Mr. Hornby," exclaimed Pipes, talking with agitation and approaching us with the gun upon his shoulder. "Sorry to frighten the ladies, I'm sure; but I don't like my men's long absence. D'ye see anything of the boat there, my lads?"

The fellow at the wheel and the man holding the lamp took a while to stare and then sang out, "No signs of her, sir."

"Can't you pull those sails round and go in search of her?" asked Mr. Edwards.

"Dursn't leave the spot, Mr. Edwards. Gor' bless you! if we didn't run her down we'd miss her for good," cried the old skipper. "What can Mr. Semple be up to?" and bundling aft he scrambled on to the rail, and putting his hands to his mouth sent his voice flying in a roar across the water. We all held our breath, but no answer was returned.

"A pretty mess!" said Hornby, restlessly flitting here and there. "If the men are lost we shall have to put back. Not over-manned as it is. Only two days out, too. What a confounded business now, eh?"

Here the colonel arrived with his wife on his arm.

"I can't stop downstairs," exclaimed the lady in an excited voice. "What with dead bodies and guns going off, my nerves have quite *given way*."

"Isn't the boat in sight yet?" shouted the colonel.

Nobody answered, and the silence was uncomfortably impressive. In the vague light I saw him thrusting his nose towards us, one after another, as though he would *gore* a reply from one of us, and he then bawled: "I dare say she's gone down! I dare say she's capsized! It's quite likely the men are drowned! Nothing would surprise me. It's not enough that Pipes should run us into an abandoned ship—why does he go hunting about for dead bodies at this hour of the night?" and he dragged his watch from his pocket as though he were drawing a cork, and went over to the skylight and dodged about there to read the time.

Miss Inglefield had relinquished Miss Edwards's arm for her mother's, and seeing this I said, "You have a keen sight, Miss Edwards; will you step aft with me and let us see if we can make out the boat?"

She immediately consented. We stood on the taffrail, and I told the fellow on the quarter to hide his lamp for a moment as the sheen bothered the sight, and then we looked; but neither of us could see what we wanted. The play of the surges was perplexing; they made a throbbing out in the darkness, and though again and again I could have sworn that the black object I saw was the boat, it always proved the lift or curl of a billow as its disappearance or the gleam of froth that followed regularly proved.

"How dismal the sea looks!" exclaimed my companion. "One feels, after all, that there is justice in Colonel Inglefield's remark that a thing of this kind happening, as it were, on the very threshold is depressing. But I am not superstitious."

"Nothing yet has happened," said I.

"We have passed a dead body."

"Oh, Miss Edwards, you will not surely accept such an incident as fateful?"

"No, because I am not superstitious; but at the same time I could sympathize with any one whose mind was troubled by such a thing. Perhaps," she continued, "I feel so *now* because of the darkness and the dreary washing noise of the water, and—and the thought of the dead-man out there and our boat's crew. And is there not something to make one shudder in the very look of the stars?"

I knew what she meant, for it was a feeling that had more than once visited me at sea, when at night I had paused in a job aloft, or when walking the fore-castle deck on the look-out, to gaze at the sweep of deep indigo air so filled with stars that it was as though a meteor big enough to fill the vast dome had been shivered into dust, and had covered the sky with its brilliant atoms. Yes, I have known what it is to feel a kind of shiver run through me as I have stared at the glittering immensity on high, at the awful and *thrilling revelation* by the Night of world upon world, creation

upon creation, left bare by the black concavity of the deep to the most distant reaches of every compass-point, till a kind of craziness has come upon me with the imagination of being alone, and forming with my little body the centre of the slow and stately dance of suns, and moons, and stars ; and nothing but the shudder that followed the thought of the presence of the Godhead shining in what I saw, so that I was brought close to the majesty of the Creator by the darkling, sparkling sweep of His works around me—I say, nothing but the shudder sprinkling from mysterious dread and overwhelming awe would at such times cleanse my brains of the startling and half-mad thoughts in it. For the shivering start, you see, would be a kind of hysteric springing away of the mind from its own mood. It is a relief that the over-full imagination contrives for itself ; and I have a notion that if incipient lunatics could be taught to shudder with all the spiritual force they possess—when ever they *feel* shuddery, of course—they'd tremble—you may laugh at me—but I say they'd tremble a deal of their madness out of them, as I have.

“Boat ahoy !” roared Pipes, within a fathom of us.

We strained our ears. A faint voice *now* came along, thin as the dying echo of the last vibration of a harp-string.

“Did you hear anything ?” I cried to Miss Edwards.

“Yes, distinctly.”

“Captain,” I sang out, “your hail was answered.”

“Was it ? was it ?” he exclaimed, jumping upon the rail with a bound that had like to have broken his neck. “I heard nothing.”

“Nor I, sir,” said the man at the wheel ; and the fellow who held the lamp also said he heard nothing.

“Try them again,” said I.

He did so, and this time the answering hillo, faint as it was, came clear enough to reach the ears of us all.

“Well, I’m glad, I’m glad !” cried Pipes in the voice of a man about to break down ; and then he stormed out : “What’s been keeping ’em ? what’s Mr. Semple been about ! Why, it’s real sogering, I call it ! Does he want riding down ?”

The others approached us, Mr. Edwards limping with his hand on Hornby’s shoulder ; and we stood in a body listening and watching, while the wind sang among the rigging and the arrested ship threw the running seas from her side with a hissing, shattering noise, and the shadow of the night took yet another shade ; for the curl of moon that had changed its silvery mother o’ pearl into pale gold had slipped from the lower topsail yardarm to half way down the spanker. The crew, as many as there were of them, overhung the main-deck bulwarks, staring like ourselves ; for the boat had been a long time absent, and fore and aft curiosity *was on tiptoe*, amongst those who were awake, to know what

had detained her out in the dusky weltering. Pipes worked away with a night-glass levelled at the spot where the faint hillo had proceeded; and by-and-by he cried out, "Ay, there she is. I see her now." A few minutes passed. "Mr. Aubyn," he suddenly exclaimed, in an agitated voice, "you have younger eyes than me, sir. Take this glass, will you, and tell me how many oars you can count?" The powerful binocular brought the dim shape of the boat close, as she rose and sank, and whenever the white water of a surge ran under her, the configuration of her was as clear as a sketch in ink on paper.

"I can't see more than two oars," said I.

"Nor I," exclaimed Pipes.

"They may have lost an oar," cried Hornby.

"But I can't make out more than three men," said I.

"That's so—that's so!" groaned Pipes extending his hand for the glass.

"Four went," said Mr. Edwards.

"And one has lost his life!" shouted the colonel. "That's it, Edwards. No use blinding our eyes. I *knew* something would happen. A pretty state of things to arrive at, eh? If so much is to befall us in a couple of days, what the dickens, I should like to know, will a month's total amount to?"

"Let us wait till the boat's alongside before we make up our minds," said I.

She came along very slowly, as though the men in her were exhausted. She was headed for our lee quarter, and when within scope of a rope's end a line was flung to her and she was hauled alongside. We all bent over to peer into her, and Mr. Semple called out, "We've got the man here. Send down a bowline on a bight, will you, sir?"

"What man?" bawled Pipes.

"Him we wor sent to pick oop!" answered the second mate.

"Oh, I thought so! I *felt* they would bring it!" shrieked Mrs. Inglefield, hauling upon her husband with such violence that they both went staggering half-way across the deck. "Take me downstairs, Charley, I shall faint if I see it. Agnes, come—come at *once*, I say!" and the three of them hurried below.

"Where is he? I don't see him," sung out Pipes.

"In the bottom of the boat, sir."

"Is he *dead*, Mr. Semple? No earthly use hoisting him aboard if he's drowned!"

"Noo, sir; but he'll be dead soon if he's not got out of this."

The bight of a rope was thrown over, whilst Pipes exclaimed, "I see only two of the crew there, where's the third man?"

"We've lost him, sir."

A cry or two broke from among the men at this, and Pipes shot bolt upright with his hands raised, whilst Hornby and Edwards

stepped back from the rail with a start. But no more was said then. Leaning over the side, three or four sailors lifted, by means of a rope, a dark object out of the boat and handed it carefully on deck; then Mr. Semple scrambled aboard, the boat was hooked on and the tackles manned. By this time the commotion had aroused the watch below, and I noticed the chief mate, Mr. Bird, inspecting the body by the light of the lamp that had served as a signal; and then the motionless figure was raised and carried forward, the mate following him.

"How has this happened—how, in God's name, came you to lose a man?" cried Pipes, addressing Mr. Semple, who stood before us, burly, downcast, breathing heavily.

"In this way, sir," he answered. "We reached the thing that had gone by, and foond it to be a ship's boat capsized, and alongside it was a man riding by the mast that was held to her by its gear. As we were dragging him on board, not knowing whether he was deed or alive, intending to examine him, and if we foond him deed to let him gan, there coomes a sea that cants the boot pretty nigh goon'l oonder, and Bill Warmouth falls heed foremost and was gyen like blowin' oot the flame of a lucifer match. We looked about—he wasn't to be seen. Whether he was carried oonder the boot and got jammed there, or sunk clean away at once, I can't say. We hoong aboot the spot rowing and looking but, God guide us! he was gyen! It was noobody's fault, Captain Pipes, and if I'd have reckoned that there wor the least chance of picking him oop deed or alive, by lingering arle neet, we'd have stopped. It's a cruel bad job, but noobody's fault, noobody's fault, ladies and gentlemen," he added, looking round at us severally in the haze of light coming from the cabin lamps through the skylight, and speaking with a labouring breath.

"It's plain enough; don't be distressed, Mr. Semple," said Edwards. "It couldn't be helped, Pipes. It's a dreadful thing, but it couldn't be helped."

Pipes knew that; but the old chap was too much upset to speak for a minute or so. I saw his square face working away with agitation, and then he said hoarsely: "Mr. Semple, go below and get a sup of liquor, and tell the steward to give the two men who were with you a glass of grog a-piece."

Then walking some paces forward, he roared out, "Lay aft some hands to the main top-sail braces."

The yards were promptly swung, and before the quarter boat's gipes could be secured the *Silver Sea* was once more leaning under the breeze and slipping along the dark water, with the moon like a red scar swinging at the lee foreyard arm.

Sorry I felt for the poor seaman who had gone to his grave in *blackness in the tail of our wake*; but I was not a little concerned for Edwards also, who, neither for himself nor for his friends,

would relish this depressing incident in the early life of our voyage. There comes a greater shock from accidental death at sea than from the like circumstance ashore. Mr. Semple had put the case truly enough that evening when we stood talking at the taffrail, little dreaming of the dark, stern commentary that was so quickly to come upon his words. A man falls overboard and is drowned right off, and there is nothing to see; the very spot he went down in you could not point to, no, not if all the gold in the vaults of the Bank of England were offered you to do so. It is not only the completeness of the eclipse of life—that will be the same ashore—it is the extinction of the man's remains; the utter and eternal disappearance of that which on land you could point to and hang over and muse upon; and then there is the fearful suddenness of the thing. In the silence that fell upon us passengers whilst the crew were trimming sail, I sent my thoughts forward and imagined the interior of the forecabin; the gloom upon the spirits of the men as they listened to the story of the fellows who had been in the boat; the drowned man's empty bunk; his sea-chest, whereon, perhaps, he had sat at the supper hour drinking from his panhikin of tea and laughing and talking with his messmates. It was there that he would be missed; and it was yonder, in the forward part of the ship, where everything was as black as a wolf's throat in the shadow of the foresail and the galley and the bulwarks and long-boat, that the gloom of his sudden death would lie heaviest.

But I was pretty sure it would weigh upon us aft, too; and I was not wrong.

"Pipes," exclaimed Hornby, "go forward, will you, and ascertain if the man that's been brought on board is alive, and see what can be done."

The old fellow trudged into the obscurity in silence.

"I am afraid this incident will make the colonel troublesome, Hornby," said Edwards. "Margaret, you are not dispirited by it, I hope, dear."

"I wish it had not happened," she answered.

"Of course—of course—we all wish that," he exclaimed. "But don't express yourself as if you foreboded anything from it. It means nothing outside the bare fact of it, to people with sense. Does it, Aubyn?"

"I don't think Miss Edwards forebodes," said I, thinking that, if there was any foreboding at all, a good deal of it lay in him.

"At sea people take no notice of men falling overboard, and all that sort of thing, don't you know," said Hornby, trying to speak cheerfully. "It would never do if they did."

"I don't want to return, if I can help it," exclaimed Edwards, going with a limp to the skylight and leaning against it. "What would our friends think—and what excuse could we make? The voyage may mean all the difference between health and suffering

to me, and it would be a pity to allow ourselves to be diverted from it by a mere accident, melancholy as it is, and even ominous—that is, of course, to a nervous person.”

“Oh, certainly, we mustn’t dream of returning, papa,” said Miss Edwards, bringing her eyes away from the sea over the taffrail with a lustre caught from the haze off the glass that made their darkness and beauty almost startling in the dim light. “If the voyage is to restore your health, we must pursue it at all hazards.”

“No, forgive me,” I exclaimed. “Not at all hazards. We must not include considerations of that kind. Why, were every ship on board of which something tragical happens to put back, the look-out for people wishing to cross the sea would be a bad one indeed.”

“Of course!” cried Hornby. “Ship after ship would be returning, and the *Gazette* would teem with the names of insolvent owners and brokers and charterers!”

Here Pipes arrived.

“Well?” exclaimed Mr. Edwards very nervously.

“The man’s alive, sir,” said the skipper, “but not able to converse. He’s stowed comfortably away in blankets, and I think he’ll do. Mr. Bird’s feeding him with drops of brandy, and the blackness is going out of his face.”

“Let us go downstairs,” said Mr. Edwards suddenly; “I feel chilly. Curse the gout! there’s no doubt, Hornby, it attacks the nerves. I used to question that; but what are those nerve-affections, sciatica and neuralgia, but a kind of rheumatism?” And so speaking, he grasped his daughter’s arm, and very slowly we made our way to the cabin.

We found the colonel, his wife and daughter, seated at the end of the saloon. “Oh, tell me, is he dead?” cried Mrs. Inglefield, clasping her hands.

“Is who dead?” exclaimed Mr. Edwards.

“The man that was picked up?” she answered, putting an imploring look into her face that made one want to laugh.

“No, I am happy to say he is alive, and likely to do well,” said Hornby.

“Then it *wasn’t* a body?” she panted.

“Why, no, not if you mean a corpse,” said I.

She fell back in her chair, opening her fan with a run as she reclined, and said to her husband, “So, Charley, after all, it isn’t an augury. Oh, Mr. Edwards, had it been a *real* body, I should have begged you to turn the ship for home; after entreating Captain Pipes to keep us away from such an object, it would have been quite too shocking, as a fulfilment of my fear, had it been a real body. I should have felt that there was something dreadful behind it, something fearful in reserve for us.”

Edwards forced a laugh—he was certainly not quite comfortable

in his own mind—and said : “ Pooh, pooh, my dear Mrs. Inglefield, you mustn’t indulge in notions of this kind.”

“ I say, Edwards,” exclaimed the colonel, with a moody note in his now familiar shout, “ if we *are* to pursue this voyage—I don’t mean to say that we are certain to do so—but if we *are* to endeavour to reach South Africa, and then return home, I should be very glad if you’d just order Pipes to be a little more careful than he’s disposed to be when he finds himself in a fog, or in the neighbourhood of wrecks.”

“ Pipes is safe enough ; you couldn’t be in better hands,” replied Edwards.

“ Well, you’ll excuse me, but I don’t think so,” bawled the colonel. “ Would a good seaman send his boat out in the dark and risk the lives of the men in her ? ”

“ There should have been no risk,” said I. “ The night was fine, and the unfortunate accident was one of those occurrences which no captain could help.”

“ What unfortunate accident ? ” inquired Mrs. Inglefield.

“ Why,” said Miss Edwards, “ one of the boat’s crew was drowned.”

Mrs. Inglefield had not heard of this, having hurried below before Mr. Semple reported the fact. She looked at the colonel, who shrugged his shoulders till the bottom of his ears was spread by them, and then fell to violently fanning herself.

“ Mrs. Inglefield,” exclaimed Hornby, sitting squarely in his chair and talking with resolution, “ Edwards is our host, but this is my ship, and he’ll forgive me, I’m sure, for speaking. If you and the colonel don’t want to continue the voyage, then we must put you ashore—not in England, for it would be a waste of time that’s valuable to our friend here (meaning Edwards) to return even to Falmouth, but in some French port—Brest, or whatever place we’re nearest to. We want you to be comfortable and happy, and all that sort of thing, don’t you know ; but if you’re uneasy, why, by all means, abandon the journey. We’ll land you—you needn’t fear.”

It was the only way to tackle them. One guessed, as they exchanged looks, what was in their minds : how they had made all arrangements at home for a five or six months’ absence ; how they were perfectly well aware that it was a cheap and easy mode of killing the summer ; and how very uncomfortable it would be for them to be landed at a French port a long distance from their home, with the vast accumulation of boxes and packages they had brought with them. You wanted no special gift of shrewdness to be able to read these thoughts in them ; and what is more, during the pause that followed Hornby’s plain common-sense speech, I thought, that on the whole, so far as the lady was concerned, there *was more of elderly acting and simulated emotionalism and mis-*

givings than sincerity in her ; whilst, as to the colonel, timid as he was at bottom, nerveless, irritable, and unpleasantly blatant, he was not the sort of man, if he could not plead his wife as an excuse, to allow us to suppose that he was to be diverted by want of courage from remaining on board the *Silver Sea*.

"At all events," said Mr. Edwards, noticing, as we most of us did, the embarrassment in the silence that ensued, "you can think over Mr. Hornby's suggestion, Mrs. Inglefield. It would not be too late to-morrow, I suppose," looking at me, "to steer the ship to a French port?"

"Oh dear, no," I replied.

"If I hadn't any doubt about Pipes—" began the colonel, combing his whiskers with his fingers.

"You need have none, I assure you," said Hornby blandly.

"Besides, Charley, we know now that the body wasn't a real one," exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield, in a manner that marked a change of mood.

"Oh, hang the body!" shouted the colonel: "that was *your* superstition, Amy. If a body was to affect me, by George! I should like to know where I should have been at Azmerigunge and Gobingunge, not to mention Teroomungulam! I don't mean to say that coming across wrecks and sinking ships and floating sailors, besides losing men and so forth, is a sort of thing to make the beginning of a voyage of this kind cheerful—confound it! but there's no humbugging superstition about me, as I have told you. Edwards, it's my wife that I've been afraid of—her nervousness, you know;" and he stopped rather awkwardly, with a flourish of his handkerchief upon his forehead.

However, it was not hard to guess from all this that there was no immediate prospect of our losing the society of the Inglefields, though I could not help taking notice that more than once during the rest of the conversation on this subject Hornby repeated his suggestion that they should be landed in France with a manner that made one see that his idea had developed into a wish with him. Nor could I wonder; for, spite of Edwards's assurance to me in Harley Street that they were nice people, and that I should like them, I had found two days of the colonel and his wife—half of which, by the way, had been spent by the latter in bed—prove as much as any one was likely to need.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE MAKE GOOD PROGRESS.

I HAVE been at some pains to relate the foregoing, because if the incident of the capsized longboat and the body alongside it proved

ominous to anybody at all, it was so to me, certainly, as you will find out by-and-by. I had no misgiving then, saw indeed nothing in any way disturbing in such a trifling passage of marine life as I have given, though I do not mean to say it was a thing I could have wished to happen ; for a man may not have a jot of faith in omens, and yet would rather he had made one of twelve than thirteen at table, that the death-tick should go over the way instead of tapping at the head of his bed, that any other picture than his portrait had fallen from the wall on the anniversary and at the precise moment of his father's death, and so forth.

The night passed quietly. Hornby went to bed with one glass of grog only under his little waistcoat, and nothing more was heard of him till next morning. For my part, I slept like a top, spite of the colonel and his wife mumbling away in the next cabin, though had he snored instead of talked, sleep might not have come so readily to me. I was disturbed once by the noise of the watch on deck trimming sail, by the thump of a coil of rope flung down over my head, the voices of men singing out, and the sharply uttered orders of the officer on duty. However, I proved to my own satisfaction that I was growing accustomed to sounds which long years passed ashore had rendered unfamiliar to me, by very quickly falling asleep again ; and when next I awoke, it was bright daylight and seven o'clock.

There was a bath-room in the steerage ; but one required to give orders about it and wait, and that was a drawback. I knew that the *Silver Sea* carried a head-pump, and that I should be able to get in the ship's bows the finest, most sparkling, blue, exhilarating sluicing that was anywhere to be had ; so clothing myself very lightly, I threw a couple of towels over my shoulder and went on deck. A glorious morning it was, and one glance around satisfied me that I must abandon all hope of losing the company of the Inglefields. The men had finished washing down the decks and were employed in swabbing, coiling away the ropes, and so forth. There was a strong glittering west-nor-west breeze, and the ship was driving steadily along under a foretopmast studding-sail. It was the cheerfulest scene in life to come upon : the smoke blew away from the galley chimney, cocks were crowing in the hencoops, and you heard the farmyard grunting of pigs ; the seamen in their various merchant costumes—never more picturesque than when most squalid—their trousers rolled above their knees, and their naked shaggy arms exposing arrows and anchors and the portraits of ladies in frames like wreaths, and the red ensign, and ships and the like, gave a bustle to the decks, which were fast drying, and here and there were whitening out into a sandy glittering ; everything was full of the brilliant sunshine, and flash after flash would come out of all sorts of wet things, like a firing of musketry, as the swaying of the ship shifted the radiance from one point to another ;

the weather bulwarks ruled the blue sky, but to leeward the sea ran away from the ship into a heaven of sapphire, where you saw a thin bed of streaky cloud shot with the bluish and pearlish tints you notice in oyster-shells, and the eye glanced along the throbbing, foaming field, wrinkled with wind and fountain-like with the spray, till it came to the shining sails of a little brig hull down standing to the north-east.

But all this I took at a breath, so to speak, for I was much too lightly clad to linger over the beauties of nature; and seeing Mr. Bird aft near the wheel, I called to him to know if he could spare one of the men to pump on me. "Certainly," he exclaimed, and sung out to one of the ordinary seamen to go along with me to the head-pump. I gained the forecastle, and felt as if I ought to hold on to something as I passed under the foot of the foresail, for the wind swept down the tack in half a storm and rushed with a howl into the belly of the staysail beyond as if it would carry everything with it.

Oh, the delight of a salt-water bath—in warmish weather, look you—under the head-pump of a sailing ship! I jumped betwixt the head-boards and the rail on to a grating through which I could see the water some distance below me pouring away white as milk from the stem whose sharp edge went hissing and shearing and sliding through the surges which came blue to the dolphin striker and then turned green under the figure head and then changed into a boiling milky brightness as they received the blow of the bow. I gave the order to pump; and down upon my head fell a stream of crystal, veiling my noble figure with a glorious silver drenching drawn out of the heart of the great ocean that was sweetened and purified by the whipping of the short wind and quickened by it into a keen joyousness that one positively seemed to feel in the heart-swelling rush of water over the body.

Whilst I stood rubbing and drying myself, I asked the fellow who had given me my bath how the man that had been picked up last night was doing.

"Oh, he seems all right again, sir," he answered. "There he is," pointing to leeward of the forecastle, where stood a broad-backed man overhanging the rail. "He's had enough to sleep, sir, and has come up for a draw an' a mouthful of air afore breakfast."

I stood eyeing the man whilst I flourished my towels and got into my small clothes, for he made a kind of wonder in my sight when I reflected that the last time I saw him he was little more than a corpse squattering on the water and showing a black and sickening shape to our unexpectant gaze as he went by on the creaming foam into the darkness astern, whilst now he was a square and powerful seaman in pilot-cloth trousers and waistcoat and *flannel shirt, capless* and with a quantity of coarse dark hair blowing *about his head*.

"What's his name?" said I.

"He calls himself John Grondhal—he's a Finn, sir," answered the ordinary seaman, looking at me with a singular expression.

"Oho!" said I, noticing the fellow's look, and laughing; "a useful find, eh? A Finn's a wizard, don't you know: "and all you've got to do now is to nail a horseshoe to the foremast for good luck, and the Finn will keep blowing us along with fair winds for the rest of the voyage."

"Us men would rather have poor Bill back, sir," said the man, meaning by poor Bill the fellow who had lost his life: it don't look wholesome like for an English sailor to go down and a bloomin' Finn to come up. There's some of the men don't like the notion of his being a Finn at all—specially Dent and Joe Blackett, who've sailed with them sort of people afore. It's queer, anyhow, that the only man as kept alive through a job that drowned fifteen others should be a Finn."

"Pooh, pooh!" said I, "mere luck, my lad:" and I stepped over to have a word with the burly "Dutchman," as sailors would call him, before going aft.

"Good morning," said I. "I hear your name's Grondhal. I hope you feel none the worse for having been overboard yesterday."

He turned slowly, pulling a pipe from his mouth as he did so, and exhibited one of the strangest faces I ever saw on a human being. His height would come to very near six feet, and he was broad in proportion, yet his features—eyes, nose, mouth—were scarcely large enough to fit a man of Hornby's dimensions. The idea excited in one by this fellow's countenance was that a little man's face had been substituted for the original one, neatly laid in, and artistically smoothed off so as to show no seams, but leaving, in consequence, a broad frame of chin and jaw and forehead. There was half a ring of hair upon his throat, his complexion was muddy and sandy, his ears were immense, and in each lob was a gold hoop very nearly as thick as the silver rings worn by sailors on their fingers; and the hair of his head blowing upon his brow, and framing him to down past his ears, made his face a complete mask, absurd rather than revolting, yet startling for all that, as I felt when he confronted me with it.

"I'm all right now, sir," he replied in a hoarse thick voice and with a strong Scandinavian accent not to be expressed in writing, though he spoke English fluently.

"Glad to hear it," said I. "How long were you in the water?"

"Fifteen hours, sir."

"Fifteen hours! Did you belong to one of the vessels we passed?"

"I b'longed to de ship, sir."

"She was in collision?"

"Yash, vid de French barque. Your jeef mate hars de story."

The hint conveyed by this was not lost upon me. He looked the slowest, most lumpish sailor that ever trod shipboard, and he delivered his answers as though he knew I questioned him out of curiosity without official right to do so. So contenting myself with congratulating him on his narrow escape, more perhaps for the sake of taking another good squint at his extraordinary face than from sympathy, I returned to my cabin.

The exhilarating influence of fine, warm radiant weather upon the mind is never stronger than at sea; and when we were all assembled at breakfast, and I looked around me, it was easy to perceive that the sunshine which filled the saloon with a silver haze full of stars from whatever could reflect them was in our tempers too. Pipes had never before worn so shiny an appearance; the colonel also had somehow contrived to so ply his hairbrushes as to appreciably soften the catlike ferocity of his whiskers; and Edwards said that so far as his gout was concerned he had not felt easier in his limbs for months.

"Extraordinary!" cried Hornby. "Three days out and you're better. Doctors!" he exclaimed, wrinkling his nose: "a capful of ocean air is worth all the prescriptions that the best doctors ever wrote, from Dr. Galen down to Dr. Cockle."

"Have you been on deck, Mr. Aubyn?" asked Miss Edwards, who sat opposite me, and whose beauty—whether because she had dressed her hair in a fresh fashion, or because the colour and cut of her dress suited her, I cannot be sure at this distance of time—was so winning, that at the start I had no eyes for any one else.

"Yes," said I, "and have enjoyed a salt water bath in the bows of the ship. It is a glorious morning indeed, and the *Silver Sea* is making noble progress. Eh, captain?"

"There is nothing to stop her," answered Pipes, grinning. "Besides, she feels she's got to make up for yesterday."

"Well, Mrs. Inglefield," said Edwards, smiling, as though he wished to be understood as speaking rather in joke than in earnest, "Have you and the colonel made up your minds to be set ashore at a French port?"

"Oh, Mr. Edwards, you know how timid we poor women are," she replied, with a roll of her light eyes past him on to me, whilst every now and then you'd see a glint in the yellow hair that was much too suggestive of gold-dust to be beautiful. "Charley insists upon becoming old and petulant and nervous; and he alarms me with his misgivings. Now, I have always adored the sea, even when terrible with storm; and to ask me to turn my back upon it when it is lovely and blue is quite unfriendly—don't you think so, Mr. Aubyn?"

"Were such a request made, it would be so indeed," I replied.

"You may be quite sure, Mrs. Inglefield, that I did not beg the honour of your and your husband's and daughter's company with

the hope that you would leave us within the first week of the voyage," said Mr. Edwards.

"See now, Edwards," cried the colonel. "My wife puts it all upon me. Let her. We certainly did *not* join you with the intention of quitting the ship before her return to England. Here we are, and here we had better remain. We are not going to encounter abandoned vessels *every* day, I suppose?" looking towards Pipes; "and if we're to meet with another fog, why, it may not come, you know, till we're in the middle of the ocean, where risks of collision are small."

"I wonder how the poor man, whom the boat rescued last night, is getting on," said Miss Inglefield, changing the subject in her quiet, subdued way; from a little sense of mortification, as I judged by the look in her face; and hence it was that, more for her sake than for her parents', the reference to the colonel's and his wife's threat to leave the ship was there and then dropped for good, though but for the girl's intervention I suspected from something in Hornby's eye that he would not have let them off so easily.

"Oh," said I, answering her, "he is as hearty as I am. I found him on the forecastle, and exchanged a few words with him."

"*Did* you though, now!" exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield rounding her eyes at me. "Only fancy what I took to be a real body talking!"

"What's his name?" asked Edwards.

"Why, it's a foreign name," answered Pipes; "I don't nicely remember it."

"Grondhal," said I, "with an *h* in the tail of it, I suppose. Miss Edwards, he has an extremely small face, as though his head were a window, and a very little man was looking out of it. He's a Finn."

"A what?" cried the colonel.

"A Finn—a native of Finland," I replied, "and of course a magician. Isn't it so, captain?"

Pipes put on one of his singular square smiles, which by tightening the skin in various places increased his shininess. "Ah, Mr. Aubyn, those yarns don't hold water nowadays, sir," he replied.

"No," said I, "and yet I fancy that some of your men forward haven't quite abandoned faith in them. One of your fellows said to me that he didn't like the look of an Englishman going down and a Finn coming up, as happened last night; and upon my word," said I, turning my eyes upon the colonel with a grave face, "*it does* seem odd."

"Is a Finn capable of doing mischief as a magician?" inquired Miss Edwards, with her face lighted up by an expression of mirth *rather than a smile*.

"Sailors believe so," I replied ; "though of course the captain of a ship has power over them, and by stern treatment can force them into becoming blessings instead of curses."

"What can they do?" said Mrs. Inglefield.

"Well, I have heard of a Finn drinking himself intoxicated every night throughout a voyage, on a quart bottle of rum, and yet keeping the bottle full without replenishing it by any other means than invocations."

"Margaret," exclaimed Mr. Edwards, "the next butler we engage must be a Finn, do you hear? The very man for a cellar."

"And what more can he do?" shouted the colonel.

"Why," said I, "he can control the winds, and if he owes the captain a grudge he can raise a gale right ahead and keep it blowing till his vengeance is appeased."

"Ladies and gentlemen," exclaimed Pipes, "all this here stuff is nonsense. There's nothing in a Finn to hurt any man. When I was a boy, what Mr. Aubyn's telling you was believed in; but sailors are more sensible than they used to be; there's more learning among them."

"A Finn must be quite a Jonah," said Mrs. Inglefield. "Perhaps Jonah *was* a Finn. I wonder if we were to throw our Finn overboard whether a whale would swallow him. But I hope there is nothing unlucky, though, in having one of these people on board."

"No," said I; "not if Captain Pipes will nail a horseshoe to the foremast."

"There won't be such a thing to be found in the ship," observed Pipes. "Come, come, Mr. Aubyn; these here tales have gone over to the marines. They've long since been cleared out of the fore-castle."

"Any other peculiarities associated with Finns, Aubyn?" inquired Hornby.

"I believe," I replied, "that seamen, when beating against storms of wind amid raging seas, have beheld vessels bound the same way passing them under stun' sails, and have recognized them as Finlandmen making a fair wind of what by right should be blowing in their teeth. But many stories of this kind may be traced to the rum puncheon."

"Ay," exclaimed Pipes, "and as grog grows scarcer yarns'll grow rarer."

"Anyhow," cried the colonel, "a native of Finland on board a ship is considered by the crew as unlucky?"

"Yes," said I.

"No, sir!" cried Pipes.

"But confound it all, Aubyn," shouted the colonel, "didn't you *just now* say that one of our men told you he didn't like the look of *this Finn* coming aboard?"

"Yes."

"I don't know which man it was that said it," exclaimed Pipes; "but, whoever it might be, he'll be more an ass than a sailor."

"Of course such stories and superstitions must be stuff and nonsense," bawled the colonel; "but it's curious, Edwards, that we should have lost one of our crew only to pick up and replace him by a person of a nationality considered unlucky and capable of evil-doing by seamen. I say it's curious—mind, I mean nothing more. Only *curious*."

"Now, Charley," exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield, with an affectation of fretfulness in her voice, "for goodness gracious' sake, no more horrid fancies, if you please."

Hornby then asked Pipes about how the man came to be washing about in company with an inverted longboat, and Pipes explained the matter thus: "His story to Mr. Bird's this, ladies and gentlemen: his ship was an Englishman, and she was in collision early yesterday morning with the French barque we passed. It was still dark; the well was sounded and the ship found to be draining in water. She was an old vessel, the crew hated her and her captain, they refused to man the pumps, and turned to and got the boats over. They had only two boats fit to swim, having lost one in a gale and the other being damaged; so they raised the longboat out of the chocks, and when alongside nearly a score of men jumped into her, but first they took care to load her with their traps; and then, finding the other boat had gone away with the captain and mates and steward, and seeing there was no hurry, they got aboard again and broached a cask of liquor, and some of them fell mad drunk."

"Shocking!" cried Mrs. Inglefield.

"Then some kind of fighting took place after they had rolled into the boat and shoved off; and she being badly stowed, and the intoxicated fellows surging about in her, not to mention there being a trifle of sea on, enough to keep her lifting and rolling, why, amongst them, they managed to capsize her; and though some held on a tidy while, yet they were all pretty nearly too drunk to save their lives, and one after another they dropped off, leaving this here Finn holding on—that's his yarn: perfectly correct in all particulars, I don't doubt; but, as usual, something to make an old merchantman like me blush for the service he belongs to."

"How long had the man been in the water when we came across him?" asked Edwards.

"Fifteen hours, he told me," said I.

"Yes, that's what he said to the mate," observed Pipes.

"Fifteen hours!" cried the colonel; "upon my word, the man had need to be a wizard with a vengeance to keep alive for fifteen hours—*eh, Edwards?* By George!" he added, with a loud laugh,

"it should make one think sailors no fools for supposing these Finns to be magicians."

Well, all this was good enough to talk about, and it helped us through breakfast; besides, at sea, topics are so rare that a very little matter indeed will be made a great deal of. Nobody but I, that is, of our company, knew what a glorious morning it was on deck, and it was a revelation to them all when they climbed the companion and looked around them. The wind poured in a blue tide out of the west-nor'-west, and when you faced it with your lips apart you heard it thrilling betwixt your teeth with the edge of the piping of a boatswain's whistle in it. Warm and rich and full of weight, it swelled the white canvas into curves as hard as marble, arching every foot so that you saw bits of the sails beyond and the sapphire sky between, and you got a sense of velocity from the inclination of the deck that leaned like a yacht's in a racing match; for though I won't say that the *Silver Sea* was a crank vessel, yet, being light, it did not need a gale of wind to provoke the beauty into showing her shining heels; and now she was whirling through it with her lee channels under and a constant sobbing and coughing in her lee scupper-holes, over and past which the water was racing in a maddened and dazzling white whirl, that lifted in smooth snow over the steady wave our quarter bore along with it, and then flashed down into the windy sparkling tumble of our wake, over which the grey shapes of half a dozen of gulls were flying with arched necks and gleaming eyes and dark beaks on the scent for anything good to eat that the mighty share of our keel might chance to plough up and leave exposed in the foaming furrow astern. Oh, it was a morning to make a man of seventy feel ten years old! The wind was full of the spirit of life; and in your very innermost being you felt the subtle quickening of it till your heart bounded with a joy there was no explanation for; and the rushing of the ship seemed to sweep like a passion into your blood and convert the sense of vitality into a kind of flight, as though a gift of wings had come to you and you were tasting the transport of the middle air.

Every one of us, ay, even the colonel, when on deck, came to a kind of stand as it were; and especially did I notice the lustrous delight in Miss Edwards's face as her dark eyes ran kindling round the glittering glorious azure amphitheatre of the deep, and then up to the soft blue sweep of heaven, with its flight of daintily tinted clouds scouring the sapphire field like frightened lambs, and then pausing with an added lustre as they came to the leaning height of the canvas and the studding-sail, stretched high over the water with a faintness at the edge of it that made the white of the cloths there look as though the sky gave a silver frame to the sail.

Omens! good or bad, they would be blown or brightened out of the mind by such a morning, and the pleased smile on

Mrs. Inglefield's face, and the expression of satisfaction that lay smooth on the colonel's brow, were as much as little Hornby needed to know that the helm of the *Silver Sea* was not to be shifted for *them*.

"This, indeed, is magnificent!" exclaimed Edwards, holding on to the top of the companion with one hand and gazing eagerly round him. "What a lovely sky! and how amazingly blue the sea is, to be sure! Hornby, there's no doubt of one thing: your ship sails capitally. Why, man, it's as fast as steam!"

"What'll be our speed, Pipes?" called out the little fellow, with his bright eyes twinkling with gratification.

The skipper cast a glance over the side and replied, "It'll be a full nine, sir, if not nine and a half. But we'll soon settle it. Heave the log, Mr. Semple."

"Heave the lug!" bawled the second mate, and a couple of fellows came tumbling aft. The reel was got out, one of the men held the glass, Mr. Semple thrust the pin into the chip and flung it over. The colonel knew all about it, of course, and so did Hornby; but Edwards looked as if he thought that nothing short of a shark would be the result of angling with a line so stout and a bait so unpalatable. Skirr, skirr, went the reel; "Toorn!" yelled the second mate; "Turn!" roared the fellow with the glass, inverting it as he shouted and squinting at the running sand with all his might. From the rattling of the reel you'd have supposed that the ship was in tow of a comet. Mr. Semple's arms worked like a windmill as he helped the line overboard; the man who held the reel vibrated with its swift rotation till the teeth chattered in his head: then "Stop!" shrieked the sailor holding the glass. "Stop!" cried the second mate, checking the drag of the great length of line, the weight of which jammed him against the grating abaft the wheel; he took a turn with it over the belaying pin, and then groping along till he came to a knot, "Tan and a half, sir," said he.

"What's that?" asked Edwards.

"We're sailing at the rate of ten and a half knots an hour—call it twelve land miles," answered Hornby, rubbing his hands and looking up at Miss Edwards with a grin.

"Would that be considered good?" demanded Edwards.

"Fust-rate, sir," answered Pipes, "with the wind blowing as it is. Should have guessed her myself a knot under that," he added, with a glance to leeward.

"And that's what is called heaving the log, eh?" said Mr. Edwards. "Very interesting, I'm sure, though all the same I don't see how you get at the speed by throwing a rope overboard."

"I'll explain it in a second," answered Hornby, balancing himself with his hands in his pockets. "The sand in the glass runs for twenty-eight seconds. Very well. Then you fasten a bit of wood at the end of the line with a peg in it to make it hold water

and the peg comes out when you jerk it, I mean when the sand stops running and there's enough line out and all that sort of thing, don't you know. It's then a rule-of-three sum. You say if a ship sails one mile in one hour, how many feet will she sail over in twenty-eight seconds. Don't you see? and when you have got the answer, you measure off the distance on the line and put in bits of stuff with knots on 'em, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, and on the first piece of stuff you tie one knot and on the second two knots, with divisions between to show the half knots, don't you know; and that, no doubt, is the reason why miles at sea are called knots, though, 'pon my life, it never occurred to me before," he exclaimed, looking surprised.

"Dear me! how wonderful!" said Mrs. Inglefield, who of course did not understand a syllable of the little fellow's explanation.

"Well, I suppose it's as you say, Hornby," observed Mr. Edwards, "though I'll ask you to repeat what you have told us presently, as I didn't quite take you. Margaret, dear, give me your arm: I really feel as if I could walk this morning."

But the colonel's face was full of heaving the log. I had watched him impatiently listening to Hornby, and he now let fly. We were all glad to perfectly understand him. He roared out so loud that not on any consideration would we have missed grasping his meaning with the utmost accuracy. "*That's* it—*that's* the theory of the mariner's log!" he shouted; and we all said, "Oh yes, that's it: how beautifully simple!" and then we dispersed.

Leaning on the arm of his daughter, Mr. Edwards patrolled the deck, whilst Hornby conversed with Mrs. and Miss Inglefield, and the colonel dodged first to port and then to starboard, apparently wanting to catch a sight of the Finn. Mr. Edwards walked slowly, but with an air of delightful complacency. It was unquestionable that his aches and pains felt the magic of that glittering north-west wind, and I was heartily pleased to see the sufferer stepping out with a sort of triumph, as if he had thoroughly felt himself, from crown to great toe, and could trust the unusual exertion of a continuous walk.

"Every foot you measure will benefit you," said I as he passed me; "top this magnificent air by all the exercise you can take, and depend upon it you will return a 'well man,' as sailors call it."

He flourished his hand with a delighted laugh. Heavens! how happy the absence of pain makes the sufferer till he gets used to his freedom. Many a glance I'd steal at his daughter as I leaned against the lee bulwarks smoking my pipe, with a scupper-hole betwixt my feet snarling and snorting froth at times, as though the nose of a wild beast was jammed in it. I thought to myself a man *should be proud to possess* such a noble form as that to lean on in

sickness, to find sympathy in in gladness ; not perhaps as *daughter*, though that privilege should be a great one, but as—pooh ! pooh ! better admire the ship, I thought to myself, if your heart *must* expand ; better let your thoughts go adrift along with what can't hurt you by dwelling on. A handsome, regal, tender, and gracious woman she is, with eyes like a special title to her from the Paradise of St. John—not Mahomet's ; no, confound it, as the colonel would say, there was nothing of the houri in her ; and as noble a singing voice as ever lady lifted up, and an heiress, too ; and therefore, surely, not a jewel reserved for my discovery. I should have been a puppy to dream it, even had I been in love with her, and I was not. No ! if some other heart, if some other hand, were not before any man dating his acquaintance with her from the departure of the *Silver Sea* from Plymouth, then, thought I, continuing my reflections, I might honestly imagine her beauty had been given to her as it is given to any lovely nun—for no purpose intelligible to a virtuous Church of England gentleman. Could I doubt that if she was not actually engaged to be married, she was certainly in love ? Why wasn't he in this ship with her, then ? How could I tell ? But it was impossible to watch her without that fancy being strong in me ; nor did it occur to me that it might be worth while to sound her father on the subject, or ask the Inglefields questions, simply because I was not in love with her, and therefore, I was uninterested, though it pleased me to follow her beautiful shape, to steal peeps at her wonderful eyes, and to let my thoughts flow in her wake, just as the tobacco smoke from my pipe fled heavenwards on the wind.

The contrast between her and Miss Inglefield was the difference between flushed and stately beauty, and timid and blushing prettiness. After all, thought I, taking a look towards the weather rail almost abreast of me, where Miss Agnes stood listening to a conversation between Hornby and her mother, if it were not for the other's eclipsing splendour, one should find something not a little sweet in that pensive, rather wistful, quiet face yonder, with its blue eyes taking a shade of violet from the shadow of her hat, and threads of her golden hair flickering like the glory one sees round the reflection of the sun in a drop of rain or in anything polished or bright as they trembled to the wind with the blue of the sky beyond her. Any other mother than Mrs. Inglefield would have made a woman of her by this time ; for the makings were there ; you saw the bud full and swelling in the clutch of what confined the pretty flower and hid its colours ; and that thought took my eye, with a livelier disgust in it than I ought to own, to the powdered, stout, girlish, yellow-haired matron to whom Hornby was talking with springy legs, and genteel gesticulation and an occasional clutch at his tiny white billycock hat, when his nervous twiddling movements brought his head sideways to the wind.

Well, it is pardonable to criticize one's friends, especially on board ship, where one has very little to do; but I soon wearied of my self-commune, and, seeing the colonel gazing at me as if he had a mind for an argument. I knocked the ashes out of my pipe and joined Hornby, and, Edwards growing tired, we were presently all in chairs talking.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SEA MESSENGER.

AFTER lunch there came more of a settled-down look aboard the *Silver Sea* than was before noticeable; at least I thought so when I saw the ladies under a short awning, Mrs. Inglefield stitching wool-flowers into what was perhaps a book-marker, and Miss Edwards lying back with a volume in her hand, yet with many a lifting of her shining eyes from the page to the sails and the sky, and Miss Agnes with a drawing-pad on her knee, sending her blue glances along the deck as she sketched, to the apparent discomfort of the old seaman I had talked to in the fore-rigging, who was now doing something on top of the booms, and who stared aft as if he believed she was taking his likeness. The only homely touches a ship ever receives she gets from women; for without them the decks are so much running gear and planks and belaying pins; but when women are aboard, especially if they be young, you'll see odds and ends belonging to them stuck into the hollows of coils of ropes, a work-basket—a pair of gloves, a novel; and the difference between a ship so furnished and a ship freighted with males only is just what lies betwixt a bachelor's sitting-room and a married man's parlour.

Right ahead of us over our weather bow was a tiny sail white as a star on the blue; but elsewhere the circle was unbroken. Glancing aloft, it came into my head that the mizzen topmast cross-trees would provide me with a breezy seat for a smoke, and I went leisurely to the shrouds and got into them.

"Hallo, Aubyn, where are you going?" cried Edwards.

"Up the mast," I replied, "for a smoke and a philosophical survey of the deep."

"Mind you don't fall!" exclaimed Hornby.

"I will," I said.

"I wish I could accompany you," said Miss Edwards. "I would give *anything* to view the sea from the tiptop of the mast."

With my foot upon a ratline I reflected, and then said, "I am afraid it *can't* be done, though I wish it were possible. You

couldn't get over the top, you know," meaning the platform so called on the lower mast.

"The leddy might be whipped up, sir," observed Mr. Semple, who stood under me.

She flushed red as a rose at this, not understanding it; Mrs. Inglefield stared at the colonel with a sort of horror; Edwards looked indignant and amazed; and Hornby, with a shocked eye bent upon the skylight, seemed to be seeking Captain Pipes through it. I burst into a laugh.

"Mr. Semple means that the only way to get you aloft, Miss Edwards," said I, "would be to pass a rope through a block at the masthead, which rope, in the barbarous language of the sea, is called a whip: one end of the rope being attached to you, the other end would be hauled upon by the sailors; and this is what Mr. Semple means by speaking of your being whipped up."

They all laughed now; but poor Mr. Semple, whose slow mind had by this time grasped the misconstruction that had been placed upon his marine language, walked hastily forward to the main rigging, and stood there with his back upon the company and his face of as flaring a crimson as a winter sunset.

I thought that enough had been said about Miss Edwards going aloft, though had it been a contrivable matter, the fresh beauty that seemed to come out of her rich confusion was nicely calculated to make me encourage her wish, and I pursued my road up the rigging, taking the top by way of the futtock shrouds, instead of the lubber's hole, in proper sailor fashion, and jogging on till I had a cross-tree betwixt my legs and my back against the topmast head. Some of the men forward ceased their work to look at me, and I expected to find one of them in my wake to exact a "footing" as it is called. But I was not troubled. Maybe they guessed by my manner of climbing that I was not quite a new hand; or, perhaps, understanding that the *Silver Sea* was no passenger ship in the sense that term carried in their minds, they fancied Pipes would not sanction any of the conventional sea-larks aboard her. Well; unless a couple of them tried their hand upon me by taking both sides of the mast, there was no man forward that I caught sight of calculated to alarm me by a chase. There was not a backstay too long for me to descend by even had I had no mind for the stays; and perhaps on the whole I was not a little disappointed that no effort was made to catch me, for I saw that Miss Edwards had stepped out from under the awning to watch me climb, and when eyes such as hers are fixed upon a young man, why, it's not very wonderful if he should desire an excuse to show off.

"It's glorious up here, Miss Edwards!" I called to her. "Is there no way of getting you aloft?"

She smiled and shook her head, but would not strain her voice to answer me from that distance. Then all of them came forth to view

me ! but oh, the disenchantment wrought by elevation ! Hornby looked like a marmozet, which, as you know, is a very small monkey indeed ; the colonel's face was shrunk into a little fluff of hair ; Mrs. Inglefield might have passed for a football with the perpendicular foreshortening ; Edwards did not seem taller than the binnacle compass ; Miss Inglefield shrank into a little child's stature, and you would have been amazed to hear that the small creature alongside her presented to you, when surveyed from her own level, as superb and commanding a form as ever made a woman royal in appearance. Upon my word, I was almost thankful when they had done staring and withdrew to the shelter of the awning ; for though there was nothing in the shrinking of the males to disturb me, the satirical Lilliputianizing of the stately Margaret Edwards went against the grain ; it was like seeing too much, catching a glimpse of one of those fortuitous cynical revelations which are obnoxious to sentiment, and which breed thoughts not a little damaging at times to idealism.

But when one turned one's eyes from being only a little lower than the angels, visible indeed from the altitude of the mizzen topmast cross-trees, though twice that height would have rendered an opera-glass valuable for their determination ; when one looked from them to the ocean, then one found a difference. For the farther one got away from her the vaster, the nobler, the more majestic she became, till I, perched at no giddy height indeed, yet commanding an eminence of, let me call it, ninety feet, beheld leagues and leagues of weltering blue, sloping into crystalline clearness where its extremities touched the sky, its summer surges sobered into little more than ripples, flecked with foaming crests like the white bosoms of sea-gulls, with the high sun pouring its flashing diamonds upon the southern azure, and small clouds rolling up in puffs of steam out of the confines of a blue hemisphere, whose cerulean dome had been lifted and lengthened till the sight reeled with the sense of distance, as it sought to penetrate the remote, bewildering, airy softness.

If there be such things as animal spirits in a man at all, the place to make them bubble and popple in him till they have vent in laughter or song is the masthead of a sailing ship leaning down to a strong breeze soft with a western touch and fresh with what comes to it from the north, with a blue heaven high over him and a blue ocean—looking tenfold wider than one is accustomed to see—far down under him ; for the music in the rigging is all about him, he might be floating skywards with the white sail that hollows out below and above him, and the sense of the freedom of the speeding sea-bird is his as he sways with the masts, and listens to the faint thunder of the wind in the canvas, and brings his gaze from the *azure distance* to the thin streak of ship racing below, with the snow of the cleft surges pouring fast on either hand, and her brass-work

flashing, and her white decks glistening as the sliding shadows of sails and spars and shrouds are swept by the afternoon effulgence here and there, whilst not a sound from the distant fabric comes aloft, where all that is heard is the swinging melodies of the pure sweet wind whistling shrill as it splits upon the ropes, or pouring with a noise like the rolling of a drum into the distended cloths. Small wonder that I found myself singing some sea-song or other at the top of my voice, whilst I slowly loaded my pipe; for let me abuse the sea as I would as a calling, I felt the old touch of the devil that drove me to it in days gone by strong in me up in those cross-trees, and I actually caught myself wondering that six months of hard work and hard treatment should have sufficed to drive me off old Ocean for good and all, as if *that* had happened only a short while since. But the chap at the wheel and Pipes, and the second mate, all looking up together on the broad grin, to see what sort of bird was raising such a croaking up in the rigging, together with my catching sight of little Hornby and the colonel forking their heads past the awning to observe me, caused me to silence my notes; so, leaning against the mast, I smoked my pipe, and for a quarter of an hour enjoyed the most delicious spell of indolent happiness that ever fell to my lot to taste in this world.

And for a very much longer time yet should I have kept myself mast-headed, but for a rather strange thing. There followed in our wake some four or five sea-gulls, and I was watching with deep admiration the exquisite grace of their sudden swoops, the beauty of the tremorless wings they'd pause on at times, and then the inimitable ease of their slanting rushes against the wind, and the amazing dexterity and swiftness of their pouncings and risings, when my eye was taken by a gull flying with something of the directness of a crow, and approaching the ship out of the south-east quarter. I kept my eye on it as it came, struck by the languid beating of its wings, or, to put it more accurately, by a behaviour of flight and a posture of head that gave one the notion it was wounded. I suppose it intended to fly past the ship, though it did not swerve as the vessel ran at it at an angle. I looked to see it strike the maintop-sail or topgallant-sail and fall. Nor was I far out in this measurement; only instead of striking these sails it flew against the mizzen topmast rigging, at the head of which I was seated, and after a convulsive swaying upon one of the ratlines it dropped with a slow expiring flutter into the top.

I waited, expecting to see it take wing afresh, but while I watched it rolled over on its side. Seeing this, I knocked the ashes out of my pipe and descended the rigging to inspect the bird. It was a big gull, larger than the average, and a fine specimen. Peering close, I perceived that its eyes were glazing, and on touching it I found it dead. It was not, however, until I had moved it that I *spied* a packet or letter attached to its neck and hanging against

its breast, as thin as an envelope and about the size of one, carefully enclosed in a kind of fine transparent oilskin or waterproof silk. It was not easy to drop over the top with that heavy bird in my hand, so I squeezed through the lubber's hole as best I could, and descended the shrouds with the gull's neck in my hand and its body over my shoulder.

"Hallo!" shouted Edwards, the instant he saw me: "what, in the name of fortune, have you got there? A turkey, is it?"

I threw the bird down on the skylight, glad to be eased of the weight, and you may suppose that everybody aft, including Pipes and the second mate, came shoving and bobbing round the dead sea-fowl to have a look.

"It can't hurt, can it?" cried Mrs. Inglefield. "It has a terrible beak."

"Lor' bless you, ma'am, it's got no life," answered Pipes.

"Poor thing!" said Miss Inglefield, stretching out a little white hand to stroke it, whilst her mother shrieked, "Mind, Agnes, it may not be dead!"

"How the deuce did you kill it, Aubyn?" shouted the colonel.

"I didn't kill it," said I, looking at Miss Edwards, who I thought glanced at me reproachfully when the colonel asked that question; and talking at *her*, though speaking for the information of the others, I explained the manner of the bird's arrival and death in the mizzen-top.

"She's a poostmon, sir," said Mr. Semple, peering over Pipes's shoulder and addressing him. "D'ye obsairve the lettor round her neck? the seising will have strangled her."

"Why, yes!" cried Mr. Edwards; "isn't that a letter tied to the bird?"

I had thrown the gull down in such a manner that it hid all but a bit of the note; but when the thin envelope-packet was seen, everybody grew excited.

"Oh, what can it be?" cried Mrs. Inglefield.

"How interesting!" said Miss Edwards.

"It's quite likely to be a letter from a sailor to his sweetheart," cried Mrs. Inglefield.

"Read it, will you, Aubyn!" bawled the colonel. "It may be urgent, confound it!"

I pulled out a knife to cut the string that confined the packet to the bird, and discovered, as I might have suspected, that the poor thing had been choked. The stuff that secured the letter was a piece of stout whipcord, which, having been new when used, had been hardened by damp into the inflexibility of wire. The motion of the bird, or the wind, or the action of the sea when the gull stooped to the waves, had revolved the packet in such a way as to *twist the cord, until the compression of the ligature upon the neck was so tight that a portion of it was buried in the flesh.*

"A clear case of strangling," said I, as I carefully severed the cord with a penknife and removed the letter. Miss Inglefield's eyes seemed to swim as she looked at the bird, and again and again she caressed its feathers. I cut through the oilskin envelope that contained the letter with a good deal of awe. When I thought of the messenger that had brought it, the leagues it had traversed, how indeed the bird had appeared to aim for the ship out of the sky—why, I felt as if the missive in my hand had come from another world. A pigeon bringing me such a thing ashore would not have affected me as this did; it was the miles of wild ocean that made the difference, the sense of infinitude that came to me out of the frightful remoteness of the nethermost blue over the deep; and then again the carrier was a sea-bird, a creature that might have been formed of the foam of the surges, whose voice had been like the dull screaming of wind in a ship's rigging, and whose wild, aimless, careering life was that of the breeze and the clouds.

The contents of the oilskin cover proved to be a square of blue ruled paper, and on it was scrawled in faint ink:—

"May 18th.—Lat. 20° N. Long. 41°. 20° W.—Brig "*Lucy Kerr*:" H. Anderson, Master.—Waterlogged and all boats destroyed. Two men washed overboard, G. Johnson and T. Armytage. Captain sick to death. God have mercy upon us. Whoever gets this is implored for Christ's sake to communicate it to Messrs.—, North Shields, that our wives and parents may know our fate. We shall die like Englishmen. God speed this gull.—P. MARTIN, Mate."

I read this aloud in a very solemn voice, because of the awe put into me by the manner in which this message had reached us; and it was perhaps my hollow and dismal delivery that made every face as grave as a mute's, whilst there was even a sort of consternation in Mrs. Inglefield's expression, as she put her hand into her husband's arm, proving that her nerves were not altogether a sham.

"May 18th!" exclaimed Pipes, breaking the silence. "Poor fellows! they may still be washing about down there."

"Could we not go to them?" said Miss Edwards, in the same yearning voice I had noticed when she spoke last night of the desolateness of the sea.

"They'll be hundreds of miles distant, Miss," replied Pipes.

"And the poor bird has flown all that distance—only to die!" said Miss Inglefield, with a tremble in her voice that made one think of Hinda in the poem.

"Strange," cried the colonel, "how our ship seems singled out for this kind of thing! Almost a pity, by George, Aubyn, that you went aloft."

"The bird would have come all the same," said I.

"What ought we to do with this message?" asked Mr. Edwards.

"Send it home by the first ship we can signal, undoubtedly," I replied.

"Here's one coming," observed Mr. Semple, ducking his head to look past the foot of the mainsail over the bow. I peered too, and saw a small vessel within about a mile of us on our weather bow—the same craft I had noticed before I went aloft. Her masts were in one, so that her rig was not to be guessed; but whatever she might be, she would serve our turn if she were homeward bound, and Pipes at once told Mr. Semple to signal that we wished to communicate with her. This was best done with the foreroyal signal halliards, for she would be unable to see the flags if they were hoisted aft, and in a few moments the foreroyal was clewed down in order to show a clear pole, and a string of colours was flying from the royal masthead.

All this was interesting enough to us who had nothing to do; and there was an element of pathos and suggestions of tragedy in the letter that had reached us which filled the little business from beginning to end with excitement.

"Hard fate for this bird," said little Hornby, viewing the gull with the same sort of mind that Peter Bell brought to bear upon the primrose. But if it hadn't been strangled it would have gone on flying about and all that sort of thing, don't you know, and never have delivered its message."

"It reminds one of the story of Noah's ark, where the dove is sent out," said Mrs. Inglesfield; "only the dove went back, you know, to poor Noah and Shem, and cheered them with a branch of something."

"This gull wasn't wanted back," said Edwards. "All he was required to do was to deliver his message, and he's done it."

"Why the dickens should he choose *this* ship?" shouted the colonel. "*That* seems so queer to me; as if we were the only vessel on the ocean."

"What will you do with the poor bird, Mr. Aubyn?" asked Miss Inglesfield softly.

"I am afraid we must throw him overboard," I replied, admiring the plaintiveness in her pretty blue eyes.

"Could not it be stuffed?" she asked. "I would give a great deal to possess it—as a *souvenir* of this voyage, and as a memorial of its wonderful flight and hard fate," she added, hesitating and glancing at her mother with a little flush in her cheek just as a girl might who is afraid lest people should think her bold.

"I'll endeavour to get that done for you," said I. "Possibly among the crew there is some one capable of stuffing the gull, or at all events preparing it fit for being stuffed artistically ashore."

She thanked me, and smiled with the pleasure of a child over a promise. I should have better relished a request of this kind from Miss Edwards. When you looked at her handsome face you wanted to do nothing else but oblige her. And then, again, whilst Miss Agnes's heart seemed entirely with the dead bird, one saw that the thoughts of the other were with the unhappy people the bird had come from. This was no fancy; for what she was thinking of was easily guessed by the way she'd look at the gull, and then send her eyes out to sea with a beautiful far-off expression in them, like what a baby wears when, whilst being suckled at the breast, it steadily gazes away into God knows what distance.

However, we broke from our thoughts and talk and the dead gull, to see what the approaching vessel meant to do. Our fore-topmast stunsail was boom-ended, and hands stood by the topsail braces ready to back the yard; but it was a question whether the little stranger understood our signal, for she seemed too small a craft to have a code-book and flag-locker aboard. However, whilst she was still on our bow, round swang her foreyards, and in a few minutes we lay abreast of her hove to. She proved to be a smartly built but deeply freighted brigantine. Comparatively light as the surges were—for though it blew a fresh breeze it was a summer wind without much weight, she rolled upon them as if she would put her rails under; and pretty it was to watch the little fabric hove up, till you'd see her green sheathing down to below her bilge streaks, with the blue and white of the water lapping along, and leaving a wet surface for the sunlight to flash up, and then giving a long swing of her spars towards us as she sank into a hollow that pretty nearly hid her hull; but coming out again streaming and sparkling with the white foam sluicing down her bows, and the clear water running in silver lines down her side. Old Pipes climbed on to the rail, whilst a fellow in a tall hat stood up in the brigantine's main rigging. Then occurred the following conversation:—

Pipes: "Brigantine, ahoy!"

Answer: "Hilloa!"

"What vessel is that, pray?"

"The *Susannah*, from Porto Rico to London. What ship is that?"

"The *Silver Sea*, from Plymouth to Cape Town. We have a letter to send to England. Will you take it for us?"

This was answered by one of those peculiar acquiescent flourishes of the arm which a man must go to sea to learn the art of.

"Now, Mr. Semple," bawled Pipes, "bear a hand and get that quarter boat cleared away."

"And for God's sake don't go and lose another man!" shouted the colonel.

Pipes and the second mate turned indignantly, but Hornby, seeing trouble coming, averted it by calling out, "Pray be quick; for those small vessels are cool hands, and she will be off if you keep her waiting by ever so little a bit."

I gave the letter, stowed away in its oilskin envelope, to the second mate; he jumped over the side, four backs bent to the oars, and away went the boat in a wild dance to the brigantine.

"There's a chance now for anybody who's had enough of the *Silver Sea* to return home," said I maliciously, with a half-glance at the colonel.

Hornby grinned with all his might, and in order to disguise his face pulled at the wing of the gull as though he would see what it measured. The colonel stared gloomily at the vessel as if lost in thought; it did not answer his purpose, I suppose, to hear me. It was but a short pull for the boat, and a few sparkling leaps over the rich and tossing blue brought her alongside the brigantine. The fellow in the bows fished up the letter on the boathook to the man in the tall hat, to whom I could see Mr. Semple, with a hand at his mouth, bawling the story and such requests as Pipes had empowered him to make. It was a choice bit of colouring we looked at. Our white yacht-like boat alongside the black hull rose and fell like the creaming head of a surge, and there was a constant shifting of tints as the rolling of the brigantine would one moment show us her yellow decks, with a swing in of her canvas that swept a hurry of finger-like shadows over her sails, and another moment distend them white and gleaming with lines of sunlight in her masts, and fiery stars in her jet black hull, and a dash of rainbow at times under the fiddle-topped curve of her stem, when the roll of a surge caught her low bow under the bluff and burst round under the bowsprit in a sort of crystal smoke. One laughed at the sight of the row of heads along her rail, at her little gallery like a sentry-box, and a spot of red denoting the cook's head-dress, perhaps, in the door of it. These little briganlines, billy-boys, butter-rigged schooners, hermaphrodite brigs and the like, always delight my eye. I love the homeliness of them. I know all about the rats and the bugs in them; the grime of a thousand freights of coal; the rotten forecastle-beams and carlings oozy with brine and scored by the knives of generations of crews; but an outside view of them is not impaired by such knowledge. To me they are magical—even when met on the distant high seas,—in their power of raising images of our own English home waters; and as I leaned over the side of the *Silver Sea* looking at that tossing, swaying little brigantine, the great blue ocean vanished, and in its place were the English cliffs, white or chocolate, the lofty glistening chalk of the English Channel, or the low iron frontier that defiles the North Sea, with its panorama of towns and villages, or verdant openings and sullen,

lonesome rocks, and green distances paling into the dim blue of the hills of remote counties.

Mr. Semple's errand was not long in doing ; and as soon as ever he had cast off, and even before his men had settled to their oars, the crew of the brigantine had braced their yards round to the wind, and with a farewell stoop towards us the deep little fabric was heading on her course afresh, plunging and rolling slowly, but so heavily as to make one wonder what possible weather she could make of even half a gale of wind.

"Only think of going home in *her*!" cried Mrs. Inglefield. "Why, it positively makes me feel sea-sick to watch her."

"Still she *is* going home," said Miss Edwards, with what might have passed for a wistful glance at the little hooker, "and will be there in a few days."

"And how much sooner should we arrive had we a mind to turn tail?" exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "'Pon my word, Mrs. Inglefield, the more glorious the weather, the less my daughter seems to enjoy the voyage."

"Perhaps Mr Aubyn's gull has upset her," said Mrs. Inglefield, putting on a sympathetic face.

Miss Edwards laughed. "If the truth were to be known," said she, "I dare say I should be found to enjoy the sea more than anybody else on board, except Mr. Aubyn," giving me a faint bow which I thought was not wanting in a sort of satirical touch. "But it is natural that a ship going to England should make me think of home. As to this poor bird," smoothing the dead thing with a tender, beautiful gesture, "why Mrs. Inglefield, it should sadden one a little, you know ; for think of the misery of the men who tied the letter to it, and of the sorrow its message will cause."

"Very true," observed little Hornby, pulling a gloomy countenance that it might be in keeping with Miss Edwards's remarks ; "that message will make widows and orphans and all that sort of thing, don't you know, of a lot of people who are now looking forward to their husbands' and fathers' return, and joyfully thinking of the wages they will take up," and his eyes meet in a squint as he dolefully cocked them at the gull.

"If I talked like that," shouted the colonel, "I should be called superstitious."

"No, no, not superstitious, poetical, colonel, poetical," said Mr. Edwards, laughing. "Hornby is full of poetry. He reminds me of a man who once said to me, 'Ah, if I *only* had the language!'"

"Fine ideas are independent of language," said Hornby, twirling his hair over his ears. "Thoughts 'll come into the mind which can't be expressed ; proving that language is all humbug."

"I say, Aubyn," broke in the colonel, "I suppose you mean to *chuck that bird overboard*, eh?"

"Mr. Aubyn has promised to get it stuffed for me, papa," exclaimed Miss Inglefield, with timid anxiety.

"Pooh! pooh! stuffed? What, d'ye want to eat it, Agnes?" he bawled

"No, to preserve it," she replied, blushing.

"Nonsense! Pitch it overboard, Aubyn."

"Excuse me," said I. "Miss Inglefield wants it, and if anybody forward can stuff it, or clean it so that it can be preserved for stuffing, she shall have it."

The colonel was about to speak, but Mrs. Inglefield told him bluntly that Agnes wanted the bird, that big as it was it would be very interesting when stuffed, and then thanked me in her blandest and most smiling manner for the trouble I had promised to take. The colonel muttered behind his whiskers, but offered no further objection.

"Well, Mr. Semple," cried Pipes, as the second mate came over the side with his hair flying and his face red, "is it all right?"

"Arle reet, sir," he replied. "He'll hond the letter in on his arrival, and I told him to report our ship."

"Very well. Get the boat hoisted and the yards swung, Mr. Semple."

This was done, main topmast and topgallant stunsails set, whilst a drag was taken upon every halliard and sheet that looked to want it; and thus royally equipped with canvas and sloping the noble fabric of her spars from the blue, radiant, milk-sweet west-nor'-west wind the *Silver Sea* started afresh on her course, and was presently rushing along the slant of the sapphire, snow-tipped surges, throwing the spray as far aft as the gangway, and leaving behind her a wake upon whose extremity hung the little brigantine till the silver sheen of her sails died out on the azure faintness.

CHAPTER XX.

THE END OF THE GULL.

A WEEK went by without anything of moment happening. Fine weather attended us and pleasant breezes drove us soothingly into the Madeira parallels, though we were too far to the westward to sight the island. I could not well explain to you how we passed the time. One needs the landmarks of activity to measure the hours by; and since with us it was it was a lounge from the moment we rose from our beds to the moment we withdrew to them, I find very little to remember.

The clear skies and steady winds gave perhaps a touch of tediousness to this part of the voyage. They made one wish for a squall of rain or any other moderate and short-lived break to vary the

monotony. But Miss Edwards sang to us often, and delightful it was to hear her and at such times to watch her ; and we also found out that Agnes Inglefield had a pretty little voice of her own, though it cost her three or four experiments to overcome her bashfulness, which always seemed to me to have more reference to her parents, and especially her mother, than to us. Then there were books to read and rubbers to be played ; and so what with these things, and smoking and talking and eating and drinking, and looking over the side, with the sight of a sail or a funnel now and again, the hours slipped away like dry sand out of the grip of a fist, imperceptibly ; therefore, when we were ten days out from Plymouth, and old Pipes informed us how many hundred of miles we were from the Land's End, Edwards looked astonished, and the colonel cried, " Hang me, if it don't seem but yesterday since we left home."

Indeed, we were all enjoying the voyage now. There were no more omens. The Finn had been put on the ship's articles, had been furnished with clothes, and settled down into a " hand." The novelty of his rescue was passed, and there was no more wonder ; his curious face was also familiar to us, and we were all agreed that, ugly as it was, there were others among the crew quite as unlovely in their way. There was nothing for the colonel to grumble over ; indeed his nerves were being visibly improved by the salt winds and the healthy life of the deep ; though I will not say that this fully accounted for his quieter behaviour—quieter, I mean, as regards his earlier habit of routing about for something to growl over, for as to his voice, he never *could* talk without roaring out, just as he couldn't sleep without snorting, though I was now nearly accustomed to that ; since, as I have said, for a week or so dating from our speaking the brigantine nothing happened, day or night, that could have affected the nerves of even that wonderful Croaker whom readers of Oliver Goldsmith will remember. That, as a military man bristling with whisker and familiar with dead Hindoos, he was rather ashamed of the nervousness he had exhibited on several occasions, as we have seen, I was pretty sure from the manner in which he shifted his ground in dealing with the gull I had brought down from the mizzen-top.

Anxious to keep my promise to Miss Inglefield, I spoke to the chief mate about the bird, and asked him to ascertain if there was any man forward who could stuff or prepare it for stuffing. He made inquiries, and learnt that the only one who professed to know how to prepare it, was the cook ; so I carried the gull to the galley, and promised the cook five shillings if he would clean it for me, of course believing that he exactly knew what I wanted. But, unhappily, the cook used the gull as he would a goose—cut off its head, gutted, and plucked it clean. In this condition it was brought aft by an ordinary seaman, who held it in both hands. We were *all on deck when the man arrived*, and I went on talking, taking no

notice of the fellow, who, I was under the impression, held a large fowl, trussed for dinner, and had come to speak to the captain or steward about it. At last Mr. Semple, who was in charge of the deck, seeing the man standing near the mainmast looking our way, sang out to know what he had there and what he wanted.

"The cook sent me aft with this here, sir," he replied, "for Mr. Aubyn. It's the gull, sir. The cook's cleaned him out an' says there's nothen' left to corrupt, and he recommends towing it overboard in a bag for pickling it, and then tying it by the legs somewhere aloft where it'll dry hard."

"What does he say?" cried Mr. Edwards, holding his laughter for a moment before letting fly in order to make sure that he had heard correctly.

I turned and looked at the gull. "So, so?" I exclaimed: "and that's the cook's idea of preserving a bird for stuffing!"

Mr. Edwards now shouted with merriment, and one could see little Hornby grinning with laughter; but for my part, I was much too indignant to catch the humour of the thing right away, more especially as a glance at Miss Agnes's face had let me see how grieved and disappointed she was.

"Oh, papa, think of the heroic bird reduced to *that*!" cried Miss Edwards, with a look of concern, though I'd afterwards fancy I had noticed the tail of a smile in the corners of her handsome mouth. "I wonder you can laugh, dear."

"Well, well," said he, drying his eyes; "but it's too bad, though."

"Bad!" shouted the colonel: "why, hang it all, it's more like a practical joke than anything else, I think. If the cook's deliberately ruined the memorial my daughter was anxious to preserve, why—" and he stopped short, scowling with all his might at the fellow holding the gull.

"It's nothen' to do with me, sir," said the man, addressing the second mate. "What's to be done with this here carcase? I can't keep all on holding of it."

"Why, throw it overboard," I cried. "What's the good of it now?"

With a single swing he hove the remains of the poor sea-messenger over the rail, and then scuttled forward, glad to get away. This was the end of the gull, but it gave us a subject to talk about for an hour. Mr. Semple wanted to send for the cook, but I said, no; it was too late. The man was an idiot, he had destroyed the bird, and there would be no use in any further bothering. Then it was that the colonel gave us a view of the progress his nerves were making, for he roared out about the bird as a thing to be lamented; said that in his young day such an act of insolent blundering perpetrated on board ship would have earned the culprit a sound flogging; declared that he had looked forward with anxiety to his

daughter possessing the bird as something really interesting to show their friends at home; and indeed made such a fuss over the twopenny business that a stranger would have supposed it impossible that this same clamorous, indignant, military man had accepted the gull's arrival and death as one more evil omen, and had only been prevented by his wife from urging its immediate consignment to the waves.

I had never found Miss Inglefield so infantile, I'll not say childish, as on this occasion. She said nothing when the cook's mate brought the bird aft, and she was silent when afterwards we were all laughing or indignant over it. Yet when the gull was hove over the rail she turned her face away and kept it averted, as though she beheld something to interest her in the sea past the wheel, and I am certain I was the only one who saw her little hand, with a pocket-handkerchief in it, steal furtively to her eyes. Why I should have been looking at her I cannot say; maybe because I was a sympathetic young fellow, and was concerned by her disappointment, for I knew she had fallen in love with that dead sea-fowl when I brought it out of the top and laid it down on the skylight, and had set her heart upon preserving it with the kind of eagerness a child would show. I did not think the worse of her for the tear she had hurriedly wiped away. Nay, when she turned her blue innocent eyes once more towards us, with the half-anxious preliminary peep at her father and mother which I never much cared to see, methought that under that tender timid exterior there might be one of those caressing, lovable, childlike natures which many men would think themselves more blessed in winning than in owning even the stately and beautiful girl near her, brilliant and intellectual and impassioned and resolute as she was or suggested herself to be. But don't rank me among such men; exclude me altogether. I'd *think* these things; but as to my *inclinations*, why, in ten days, anyhow, I was not going to fall in love with anybody. I was just a plain guest aboard the *Silver Sea*, accompanying an old gentleman who was making a voyage in the hope of curing his gout; and hugely as I admired his beautiful daughter, much as I enjoyed her society and conversation, I could yet meet her flashing glances, see myself reflected in the lucent depths of her dark eyes, take her hand to conduct her to any part of the deck, without finding my heart's action accelerated to the extent of a single beat outside its homely and respectable seventy-two pulsations in the whole round of sixty seconds.

But in these ten days we were all of us getting to see that Edwards had not launched himself forth upon the bosom of the deep in vain. He was better; some of his swellings were diminished; he could get into a topcoat without groaning; he could bend his leg *when sitting, instead of keeping it forked out as if it were formed*

of timber ; he no longer incessantly chafed his wrists ; he further declared that he slept well ; there was a clearer look in the flesh of his face, and his appetite was extremely good. The magic of the glorious ocean air was doing its work, not only in him, but in the rest of us. For myself, I was so hearty ; my health was so irrationally good, I'd sometimes think that the sublimation of animal being I experienced was a mild outrage on nature, and that I was behaving unnaturally in never feeling I was in the smallest degree perishable. Miss Edwards's beauty seemed to ripen ; the flush of her cheek, the rose of her lips, took a richer quality, and the white of her skin, the sparkle in her eyes, gathered a finer purity. Pray understand ; I did not *fancy* this ; her father noticed it early. In Agnes Inglefield there was no great change, saving, as I sometimes thought, a little deepening of the blue of her eyes, as if something of the dark luminous sea-tint had come off the water into them with the breezes. As to her mother, it was a perpetual struggle betwixt the sun and her powder-box ; but the colonel looked uncommonly healthy, with a chocolate tinge down his nose, and Hornby's face wore the pink of the boiled prawn.

Thus, when ten days out, did we find ourselves a healthy, comfortable, satisfied company of gentlemen and ladies, all of us used to the sea, pleased with the ship, content with captain and mates—of the men forward we knew nothing—passing the time as I have elsewhere described, steering steadily through the great heart of the North Atlantic, and as little apprehensive of future trouble and peril as the colonel in the earlier part of the voyage had been frightened by what he and others of us had called bad omens.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FRESH BREEZE.

THE morning of the tenth day of our voyage broke with a pale sky and a light head wind. I went on deck as usual before breakfast to get my bath in the bows, and found the *Silver Sea* some points off her course, her yards hard against the lee rigging, bowlines triced taut out, steering sails shivering, and the weather sides of them blowing aback with every deep curtsey the vessel made, and a rather heavy swell rolling up out of the southward, the sulky backs of the liquid folds wrinkled by the breeze, and sickly gleams from the sun—that hung with an oozy shapeless look in the blue faintness that made one think of a great squashed luminous jelly-fish—widening in and then melting off their green brows as they *came lifting and hollowing* to the ship. I was no weather prophet, *yet methought, after the manner of the poet who found lightning in*

a horned moon, that wind was signified by the crushed and sprawling and draining blob of pale yellow fire up in the sky, and by the clean darksome cutting of the curves of the green swell upon the horizon, where the undulations might have passed for the great sea-serpent winding three hundred leagues of waving and sinuous coil round and round the sensible circumference of the deep, and by a certain sharpness of sound in the hissing of the froth turned up by the squeezed and squelching movement of the ship through the water, and on my way to the cabin I took a peep at the barometer, and noticed a slight fall.

At the breakfast table, the familiar sparkling sunshine was missed, whilst the drunken tumbling and pitching of the ship, that wanted some wind to steady her, exacted some murmurs.

"Upon my word, I could hardly dress," says Mr. Edwards, with the hearty laugh he'd sometimes even follow a groan with. "Several times I was nearly as possible tumbling down upon my nose; and for a man of my weight and stature to fall down, Hornby, is a rather serious matter."

"What a noisy ship this is!" exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield. "Why wasn't she made so as not to creak?"

"It's a good sign when a ship creaks, ma'am," said Pipes. "We have a saying at sea, 'While she creaks she holds.'"

"Does that mean when a ship ceases to creak she's not likely to keep together!" shouted the colonel.

"Let us think so, let us think so, since we creak so much here, you know," cried Hornby.

"What of the weather, captain?" said I.

"Why," he replied, with a mechanical squint at the skylight, "I'm counting upon this here draught breezing up; something to give legs to the ship that she may jump the swells. Pitching isn't good for spars. I'd liefer roll my fair-leaders under than bury my bobstays, any day."

"Whatever is going to come will be without wet, I think," observed Edwards. "I feel no aches."

"That may be because you are so much better that wet can no longer affect you," said his daughter.

"Well, I'll not contradict that," he exclaimed, with a face of such large contentment that I laughed to look at it. "I say, Aubyn, when you saw me in Harley Street, and I talked to you about feeling to be all bones, d'ye remember? would you have dared to predict that in ten days the ocean would give me more ease than I have enjoyed any time these two years gone?"

"I expected much, as I told you," I replied; "but your improvement is far ahead of my anticipations. I heartily congratulate you, and hope that the voyage may result in a permanent cure."

"You are very kind. After this, to talk of doctors——"

"No, no, don't talk of doctors," cried Hornby.

"But it does one good to talk of them," exclaimed Edwards. "Particularly of specialists. Never shall I forget one fashionable physician I went to. I had to wait three hours before my turn came, and during that time the room gradually filled with the maimed and the halt. I say, colonel, you can imagine how consoling it is to a fellow, who feels as if an eagle had perched on the back of his neck, and as if a rat had made a nest in the calf of his leg, to see the door of a waiting-room opened every few minutes and admit first a man with his foot trailing behind him, and then a woman with her arms out to clutch at any support to help herself along, and then a parson on crutches with his wife behind him holding a smelling-bottle to his nose, whilst a fourth staggers in with his head twisted half round, and so on, until the room grows into a menagerie, and resounds with groans and muffled exclamations. Think of sitting in such company as I did for three hours, amidst a constant shuffling of afflicted limbs and snorts of impatience whenever the man-servant appeared and called out a name."

"Well, hang me, if I could stand it," shouted the colonel; "I'd rather go to a hospital."

"Ay, but my sufferings didn't terminate with the menagerie," continued Mr. Edwards. "When I was at last ushered into the presence of the fashionable physician, the first thing he asked me was if my mother had the gout."

"Gor' bless me! asked if your mother knew you were out?" cried Pipes, who had not caught the words.

"No, captain; if my mother had ever had the gout. Then he wanted to know if my father had ever had the gout; and he gave me the impression of being annoyed when I told him that no relative of mine, to my knowledge, ever suffered from that complaint. Then he asked me my age, and inspected my tongue, and felt my pulse, and asked me how my jaws were, and put everything down in a book, and I protest when I paid him a second visit and he looked at his writing, he couldn't read it. 'Here,' said he, 'what can this be now?' 'Why,' says I, 'that'll concern my tongue, perhaps.' 'Right,' says he, reading: 'tongue white and pulse—what have I written here!' Heavens alive! how we are victimized by professional humbuggery in this world, to be sure! The curse of the medical profession is too much honesty!" he exclaimed with warmth. Hornby stared. "Yes, I'll explain. Doctors feel themselves under a paramount obligation to virtuously earn their fees—anyhow, that's the first consideration; and so what could be done quickly and easily, without an atom of professional ceremonialism, they make what my friend Pipes would call a big job of, with Latin words, needless waitings, unnecessary talk, superfluous gravity, and ponderous airs—just as some of them tie a white cloth round their

necks—and all for no other purpose than that patients may believe they are getting a great deal for their money. Go to a hospital doctor, who has nothing to earn out of you, and he'll thread the eye of a needle with your case ; but a fashionable specialist wants an aperture as big as the mouth of a railway tunnel."

"I rather like doctors," said Mrs. Inglefield. "They are so nice when one is ill."

"There are many fine fellows amongst them," said I. "Large-hearted and high-principled gentlemen, and they are often the kindest and best friends a man has."

"Stop till you get the gout, Aubyn," exclaimed Edwards, "and have gone the rounds of the specialists to the tune of some hundreds of guineas. You'll moderate your enthusiasm."

However, the scampering of feet over our heads brought us back to the weather, and before long we were all on deck, though there was no walking for any of us, not even for me, who reckoned myself, and not without justice, perhaps, the most nautical of the company. Pipe in mouth, I sought to pace the deck, but it would not do ; right amidship, where the fulcrum was, so to speak, I might have managed ; but aft, as forward, the heave was too much for me ; it was all staggering and clutching, and I speedily dropped the intensely fatiguing diversion for the lubberly but comfortable fixedness of an armchair.

The swell, indeed, seemed to have grown half as big again since I had looked at it out of the ship's head before breakfast ; and the *Silver Sea* was prancing and pawing and ducking upon it with such abominable spirit, that had old Pipes told me that there were times when she'd show half her forward keel-piece and then her rudder down to the heel of it, I should have believed him. She'd pitch so that we, hoisted up at the other end of the see-saw, would look down the slant of her decks and see the water boiling up all about her head-rails, and the bows there would lie as flat as a spoon in the hollow of the swell ; and then with a kind of convulsion, up would rise the fore-end of her, whilst the man at the wheel would sink down, and come out with a wild novel appearance along with the taffrail and the foot of the spanker and the rest of the furniture that way against the sickly, palely gleaming mountain of paint-like green water, into whose hollow our stern had swooped. It was enough to make a man hold on tight to whatever was at hand by sheer instinct. There was a light sailing wind abroad, enough to give command over the ship, but not nearly enough to steady her, so as to enable her to take the swell with its own rhythmic swing ; and every heave therefore threw the breeze out of the sails, and brought them, one after another, in against the masts with a succession of whacks like small peals of thunder overhead.

The jumping masts, the straining rigging, the groans of parrels

and trusses, the complaining of the labouring fabric, all combined to make that heavy swell uncomfortably trying. I expected to hear the colonel raise an outcry over it, but he said nothing : on the contrary, he smoked his cigar and looked as if he rather enjoyed the motion. It was wonderful that it did not capsize some of our stomachs, yet the only complaint made was by Edwards, who was so powerless to stir after he had clawed his way up the companion-ladder that Pipes and the chief mate had to grasp and shore him up that he might reach the chair, and as he went staggering along I heard him wish the ship at old Nick, for not keeping quiet until he could sit down. It was perhaps the struggle to reach our chairs that, by amusing us, rendered us unwilling to quarrel with the swell. Hornby insisted upon giving his hand to Miss Edwards, and I, who was behind them with my arm in Miss Inglefield's, whilst the colonel and his lady were rolling about somewhere farther astern, laughed till the tears stood in my eyes, as I watched the little creature swing at arm's length from her, his feet twisting under him like a doll's when a child tries to make it walk, and only prevented from tumbling down by the hold the girl had of him.

This horrible tumblefication went on for nearly two hours, during all which time Pipes showed himself desperately anxious about his masts, getting his royal halliards over to windward, hauling upon whatever running gear there was that might help as stays, and so forth, whilst he sent his little eyes rambling dolefully over the swaying, jerking, groaning, and shrieking fabric aloft, with a look on him as if he was prepared at any moment to yell out "From under!" We might as well have been in the Bay of Biscay in a dead calm, amid the afterswell of a tempest that had been blowing a week. Mrs. Inglefield told us she felt as if she were a little girl on a big rocking-horse. "One only wants a whip, Mr. Aubyn." Well, it was better that she could talk nonsense than give herself terrified airs ; but for my part, I saw so much to menace our spars in this rolling that I found myself keeping a look-out for more wind almost as anxiously as the captain and the mate ; for if what breeze there was failed, and the *Silver Sea* fell into the trough of these monstrous folds, why, we might expect enough green water betwixt the rails to render a hunt for our deck fixtures afterwards a fruitless job. One had but to listen to the mighty, yearning, thunderous rush of the liquid heights along our sides, and in the roar of them as they met under the counter, and ran rearing up till their glimmering brows would seem pretty nearly as high as our gaff-end, to guess *that*, and to dream of something worse behind it for all one could tell.

I scrambled and scuffled over to where Pipes was holding on, and asked him what he thought of this sudden violent swell. "Is *there a gale behind it?*"

"No," he replied. "But there's been more than a gale not far off and not long gone. The sky's got the haze of what it's now the fashion to call a cyclone upon it; for that's a glass that'll show a man what's happening behind the sea. How many miles off it's passed to the south'ard, for it'll have been there if anywhere, I shouldn't like to bet, Mr. Aubyn. But it's not anigh us. What I'm waiting for is wind; it'll come easterly, I doubt; and pray the Lord it'll blow in a chop round, for we don't want an interval of calm in this capsizing tumble."

He had his wish shortly after he and his mate had made eight-bells (noon) by the sun. The wind veered so suddenly that we were aback before the braces could be manned; but all hands were on the alert, for it was the forecandle dinner-hour and every man was out of bed, and very smartly, though midst a great noise of ye-oh-ing and heave-oh-ing, the yards were trimmed, and the *Silver Sea*, with the swell now broad on the bow, was speedily sliding over and bursting through the watery acclivities under a breeze that came fresh and fresher from a little to the southward of east, as Pipes had predicted. The sky cleared when the east wind blew, and the haze over it seemed to break into leaden clouds with tendrils of vapour streaming out from them and forging ahead, and melting as if these bodies would not move fast enough, and the wind in spite shredded them as it rushed along. All three royals were clewed up and the flying jib hauled down, and very soon after the mizzen top-gallant halliards were let go; for all to windward the sea was whitening spitefully, turning the horizon into the aspect of breakers, as the foam was thrown out white and staring against the leaden clouds, which looked compact till they soared, when you could see that they flew singly.

However, the sunshine dancing between and launching its glittering beams in the rolling snow, so that the tossed and raining dazzle duplicated the daylight, put a summer nature into the wind; for to landmen like us, the difference between a bronze sky and a heaven radiant with breaks of blue is the difference between a fresh breeze and a threatening storm. For some time Pipes kept the ship heavily pressed; the wind was a point abaft the beam, and the *Silver Sea* drove through the swell with the speed of a cloud shadow. She took the shoulders of the huge liquid folds with her bow, and half jumping, half shearing them, she gashed them into an acre of white, driving a terrific recoil of foam along with her stem as she sped with the strength of the wind in her canvas, and with a long floating launch of the whole fabric into the steep hollow, rising with a kind of pause as though collecting her full strength for the next thunderous shock. I don't say it was noble sailing, for the swell stopped the ship like a drogue; but for all that, it was something to bedevil one's blood, for the rage of her came into you; you felt her wrath and power as she drove the water into

smoke, and crushed into the slanting summits as though she'd tear their heart out; and what words are going to describe the feeling one got from the ship's wild jumping, the long lean down when the swell took her with the froth spinning away to leeward till the reel of its giddy glittering convulsion seemed to draw the very eyes out of one's head, and then the roaring weather roll as she reared her spars erect to the wind for one of those hissing, creaming slides down which brought the yellow spume blowing up all about the fore-castle head to be followed when she pointed her bowsprit to heaven, with a rush of bubbling water along the scuppers?

From all this you'll guess it was blowing. Edwards bawled out to Pipes to know if he called this a draught; and the old chap with a grin replied no, as it was a trifle harder than a draught; it was what he called a pretty breeze of wind. Breeze is an elastic term at sea, and Pipes might therefore have been right; but whatever it was, our friend had soon to shorten sail to it, and within half an hour of its coming on to blow the *Silver Sea* was plunging and foaming along with nothing set above her topsails.

The weight of the wind steadied and abated the swell, and when I went on deck after lunch the set of it had veered by some points towards the wind's track, so that the motion of the *Silver Sea* was rendered much more comfortable by the regularity of it, and she found less to clip through, whilst her rushing had the swing and swiftness one wanted in order get at the true spirit of the foaming, shouting, flashing ocean day that had burst upon us at noon, in strict correspondence with marine reckoning, which, as you know, starts the first of the twenty-four hours at eight bells in the forenoon watch. The deck was to be measured now, for, heavy as the leeward rolling would be at times, it was possible to keep one's balance without lamenting the want of bow legs; and I was enjoying the scene of the sinking and rising hills of green swelling along to us, bearing the smart surges of the wind upon their round backs, and catching and flinging off the light of the ducking and skimming sun as they came with, here and there, such splendour of varied hues, that you'd have thought there was some mighty prism at work and plunging its concentrated glories upon spaces of the leaping deep, when I saw Miss Edwards in the companion looking about her as if uncertain whether to emerge or go below again. Pipes bustled along to help her; but the beauty of this girl had frightened the old man from the beginning; he was, as the Yankees say, "kinder" awed by it; one would see him dwelling upon it at a distance, but when he was close to, his manner became a sort of sideways shuffling and a profoundly respectful gaze out of the very corners of his little eyes; so I was not surprised that he hove to when he saw me making for the companion, and then start off with *his deep-sea inimitable* roll for the weather quarter, where he stood waiting for more wind to come to sing out an order.

"Is walking possible?" asked Miss Edwards.

"You'll find it so, if you will take my arm," I replied.

She gave me her hand to help her on to the deck, and then took my arm, clutching my sleeve with her fingers and pressing her elbow against me for the support that posture yielded. We were well matched for height, and being pretty broad-shouldered, I furnished her with something tolerably substantial to reel against or swing from; yet I must confess that the clinging grip of this noble-looking woman excited in me an emotion that put so much uncertainty of purpose into my feet that at the first start went tumbling and staggering along very awkwardly indeed. However, I speedily recovered my self-balancing properties, and our march grew more decorous.

"None of the others will come on deck," said she. "Mrs. Inglefield says that a strong wind makes the skin coarse. Does it?"

"No," said I. "Cold chaps it, and she evidently confounds causes. But what has she to fear from wind or cold? Her face goes well protected."

"Yes, but wind will blow powder away, Mr. Aubyn. Is this a very strong breeze?"

"Why, it must be strong to force Pipes to take in that canvas up there," said I, meaning the topgallant-sail.

"What made you give up the sea, Mr. Aubyn—it's the very calling for a man?" she exclaimed stopping me to look at a great glittering swell rushing at us, creaming from base to summit with blown froth, and then clasping both hands upon my arm whilst the vessel swept up it and heeled over to it.

"I went to it as a boy," I replied, "and gave it up before I became a man. Had I struck to it as a man, I dare say I should still be a sailor, for it doesn't take many years of marine life to unfit a fellow for any other calling."

"If I were a man," said she, bringing her eyes to mine with a sparkle in them as if there were something in this wind to fan the fires that burned in those dark mystical depths, "I could desire no higher ambition than to command a ship—even such a ship as this. But some sailors spoil idealisms so," she added, looking at Pipes, who was hanging on to the weather vang like the painting of a mariner on a nautical signboard. "One wants to think of all sea captains as sun-burnt, dashing, daring, handsome fellows—but some of them won't let you, will they?"

"They would, if they could, I dare say," said I, finding myself a bit fascinated by this light manner in her, helped as it was, by the richness the strong, clear, shrieking wind was bringing out of her beauty, as the sun melts out of the sweetness of a flower; "but take my advice, Miss Edwards, and never sail with those dashing, handsome fellows."

"Indeed!"

"Let them charm you in novels ; but for the realities of the deep choose rather skippers who have bow legs and square faces." She laughed. "Romantic, lady-killing salts are only useful in the navy, where everything ornamental is esteemed. But for the stern, bitter seafaring life of the merchant service—which the navy folk despise, you know, though all the shipwrecks, all the seamanship, all the harsh toil which makes men real sailors are in it—for such seafaring life as *this*, you can't do better than keep to the Moses Pipeses of the calling, queer as they would look in evening dress and awkward as they would dance, no doubt."

"Oh yes, Captain Pipes is a charming old sailor," she cried ; "but it's impossible to talk, Mr. Aubyn ! how the wind whistles in one's lips. You have positively become hoarse in endeavouring to make me hear."

That might be true ; but *her* voice rang out as clear as a bell, anyhow, and loud as the wind roared the music of her words came sharp and thrilling with it. But she was quite right—talking was not easy. Whenever the swell lifted the ship the blast would burst in thunder against her exposed side, and split into shrieks like the whistling of a hundred locomotives as if flashed through the rigging and swept with a long, wild yell into the topsails. It was indeed blowing half a gale, but nothing harder ; it was the heavy rolling that put into it twice the spite it would have had, but for the strong watery heavings which under-ran the surges raised by the wind. It was not, however, only hard to converse, but I found it difficult to enjoy, as I otherwise should, the unusual spirits, the gay, almost frolicsome temper the girl was in. There was too much noise and too much movement. On a calm moonlit night, on a gentle summer day, it would be very well ; modulations of voice which mean so much could be heard, and there would be no clinging and staggering to choke off a point before its poetry or wit was fully born. But *now* it was like trying to converse in the stalls of a theatre when the fiddlers are tuning up and the wind instruments let fly ; but with other notes you don't get even when the performance is a nautical drama ; for the sound of the sea was not to be outshouted by the bellowing of the canvas ; and the crashing and tearing of the cutwater, rending the surges into foam that way, was deepened instead of being overwhelmed by the sullen liquid booming of the green swells washing past the ship's quarter and striking her under the counter.

Walking about arm-in-arm is an old-fashioned and decaying habit, and I'd sometimes think, on shore, that it is good only for countrymen and their wives, who are apt to lose their way or one another in sightseeing, but that to most other people except very old married couples, it gives rather a ridiculous air. At sea the *perpetuation of this custom is a necessity*, for ladies must not be *allowed to stagger about alone*. I don't suppose I should have

found much to admire in it had my companion been Mrs. Inglefield, for instance ; but when it came to Miss Edwards leaning upon me for support and locking her fingers upon my sleeve at every hard roll or plunge, I discovered so much that was agreeable and sensible in the practice that I don't think I have ever seen anything foolish in it since. Ashore, no excuse could have been easily found, outside a festive occasion or a situation of danger, for an association so intimate. And even ashore, this arm-in-arm posture would have lacked the numerous thrilling clings which the tumblefication of the deep gave it, the tender collisions of our shoulders, the affectionate chafing of our elbows, and the not unfrequent heave of her whole noble form plump against my Apollo-like figure.

Well, such a picture as this should have been lively enough for the ignition of my heart and the production of what the old poets called a "flame." I do not know why I wasn't conquered then and there by her, for no theories about her being in love with somebody else, or being quite unlikely to return my ardent affection, could have hindered me from conceiving a passion for her any more than similar considerations have stopped others ; for it was not only our linked patrolling of the decks—her handsome face was close to me more radiant with light and exquisite colour than I had ever before seen it ; her rich contralto voice and laugh were so near that I could almost feel the warmth of her breath in the tones—likely enough, despite the pouring wind, if you'll consider how her lips must needs approach my own to enable me to catch her utterance above the roaring and washing sounds. The distraction of the rolling and plunging ship, the headlong melting coils of water, the bellowing of the canvas, must have come with it, I suppose, as a kind of neutralizing element ; yet for all that, I mightily enjoyed the half-hour she gave me with nobody on the quarter-deck but Pipes and the mate, who had their hands full in tending the vessel, and the two seamen at the helm grinding at the wheel to meet the flying clipper's wild swervings ; for if it was impossible to talk freely, there was a score of things to look at ; and I somehow found more beauty and wildness in the glowing sun-touched deep and the racing clouds and the dazzle of foam that roared glaring and broadening round the tearing and shearing hull, for the manner in which she would make me stop whilst she looked, and the flashing eyes she turned upon them, and the few words that would ring bell-like from her lips, as she pointed to whatever attracted her.

CHAPTER XXII.

WE SIGHT A DISABLED STEAMER.

MISS EDWARDS went below, and I stowed myself away under the lee of a quarter boat, where I could smoke a pipe, and here I was joined by the old skipper.

"This should be a breeze after your heart," said I.

"A trifle more than's necessary," he replied, "as we're a bit crank. Were we freighted I'd show a topgallant sail to it; as it is, she'd do better with the upper foretopsail rolled up. But it's not going to hold. It's but a summer blow, I allow, and as likely as not to die out with the sun."

"A few puffs of this kind would soon carry us into the trades."

"Yes, sir. It'll be a nice voyage, I think. Wonderful, certainly, how it's pulling Mr. Edwards up."

"Yes, and others also."

"The colonel, not least," he exclaimed, grinning. "It's tautened his nerves, anyhow. He don't often grumble now, and his fears appear to have been blown out of him. What a very beautiful lady Miss Edwards is, to be sure. It's a pleasure to watch her walking, Mr. Aubyn. Never see a female with such a figure, and her way of taking the deck's more like floating than stepping."

"She is indeed a very beautiful lady."

"And good too, I warrant. Say what you like, sir, when you see a proper lovely female, you may always reckon her being as first-rate inside as she is outside. It's like a beautiful hull; the material's almost always good, for it don't pay the builders to worry about elegance when the stuff they mean to use is bad."

I nodded my approval of his image.

"Then there's Miss Inglefield, again," continued the old fellow, shouting loud that I might hear, and evidently relishing his topic; "she's not to be paired with Mr. Edwards's daughter, but there's something in the blue of her eye that pleases me in a way I can't express. Don't know what it is, I'm sure; but now and again ashore I've come across a flower that's given me just the same sort of feeling. She's got a heart, that young lady has; and I'm of opinion it's inside of as true a woman as ever lived, though she'd pass for a kitten for timidity. How her papa came by her beats my time."

"What do you think of her mamma?" said I, enjoying the old man's criticism of his passengers.

"Well, her nature just ends where her daughter's begins. She was growing into a woman when something came and stopped her. It might have been vanity. Vanity, Mr. Aubyn, is a quality that *comes upon a human being* holding a pair of shears in its hands,

and it goes on cropping and cropping till the ground's covered with dying principles and perishing virtues, and what's left isn't worth having. Then, to pursue this here allegory, finding itself pretty nigh stripped of nature's ornaments, what does the female mind do but turn to and cover itself with sham finery. Mrs. Inglefield is not real. She's like a soup and bully tin warranted full of meat, which, when ye open, you find to contain little more than gas, the contents having decayed into that element."

"She'd enjoy that simile," said I.

"Well, well," he exclaimed, "it isn't fair to judge, is it? We've all got our faults, sir, and nobody in this blessed world more than sailors."

The look he directed forward as he said this made me ask: "You're pretty well satisfied with your crew, aren't you, captain?"

"There's some bad uns amongst them," he answered, with a shake of his head. "There always are, in every ship's company nowadays."

"What sort of sailor man does your Finn turn out to be?"

"Why, what's called a scaramouch, Mr. Aubyn. I don't say I'm sorry we picked him up, because life-saving is every man's duty. But I'd rather have him overboard than the man we lost. It's not the cut of his jib that I mind; he's got a cursing face which, without speech, calls a blessing down upon your eyes and limbs every time you sing out an order to him. He's a mule of a man too; sulky and slow. But what's the use of talking of him!" he exclaimed, breaking away from the subject with a look at the skylight. "There'll be some cutting and running, I dare say, amongst the men when we get to Cape Town; and if the Finn should be one of them as take to their heels, why the man that'll pursue him don't stand in Moses Pipes's boots." He rolled his eyes around the sea and said: "The wind's coming with less weight already."

It was a little after three o'clock in the afternoon. The sunshine, as it flew down betwixt the clouds, had a wonderfully pure white brilliance, and wherever the blue sky was visible it had a pale, delicate, fair-weather look. But though the skipper found the wind lessening its power, to me its volume seemed undiminished; and not only did its velocity make it feel like a gale, but the appearance of the sea gave it the look of one. From horizon to horizon it was all one foaming expanse of glittering green ridges, steadily running, with wildish clouds pale as sulphur-smoke, and every one with a twist in it as though they represented an arc in the circle of the wind, soaring, as it might seem, out of the distant-most of the olive-coloured hollows. There was not much swell left, and the reeling of the ship had something of the regularity of a pendulum, as, under topsails and foresail and mizzen staysail, she swept through the deep, raising a perpetual roll of thunder under her bows as she smote and spurned the living tumultuous

billows, now coming to windward on the side of a sea that lifted her lee chains white and streaming out of the whirling froth, and then leaning down to it again with a long hissing rush of the whole racing length of her till the dazzle of spume was flying along the level of the leeward rail, and the foresheet was buried and ripping up the water into a dozen flashing fountains. It was a sight to need a deal of looking at to tire a man ; but the wind wearied my eyes, so I thought I'd step below for a half-hour's nap.

Edwards and Hornby were playing double dummy at the table near the rudder trunk. They were so absorbed that they took no notice of me. The others were in their cabins. Edwards used his hands freely, and I could not help smiling when I contrasted the ease of his gestures now, with his movements when I called upon him in Harley Street. Thoroughly and effectually seasoned to the jumping of the ship they both must have been by this time, to enable them to concentrate their minds on the cards and pay no heed to the heavy plunging and to the roaring sound of the water all about them, felt and heard where they were seated as they were to be felt and heard in no other part of the vessel. I entered my cabin, took a book, and got into my bunk, and after reading drowsily for ten minutes or so, fell asleep.

I was awakened by somebody calling out my name, and saw little Hornby standing in the doorway.

"I say, Aubyn. What! a young fellow like you sleeping in the afternoon? Come on deck, man, come on deck. Why, if I were to let you miss the sight that's to be seen there, you'd never forgive me."

"What's the matter?" I exclaimed, jumping up.

"There's a big steamer in sight ; an ocean passenger boat, Pipes thinks ; with a distress signal flying. Something's wrong with her, and we're steering for her to find out what's the matter." And impressing me more than ever with his resemblance to a bird by his jerking, hopping movements, and his little bright round eyes, and the fluttering motion of his elbows, he ran away on deck.

I made haste to follow him. It was one bell in the first dog-watch ; half-past four o'clock. Every living creature aboard our ship was on deck, and seamen and idlers stood in a crowd forward staring ahead. Aft, Pipes marched to and fro with a telescope under his arm ; the two mates were together in the weather gangway, whilst Edwards and the ladies, and Hornby and the colonel, armed with glasses and binoculars, were bowing and curtsying, as it might have seemed, to the mainsail, in their efforts to fix the object which rose and fell in a direct line with our flying jibboom.

It still blew a fresh breeze of wind, but much of the volume it had when I went below was gone from it. A smaller sea *was running too*, wildly green and white and lustrous, and the

clouds had lost their curved and streaming appearance, and sailed along the moist-looking blue in compact bodies, more like shapes of snow than vapour. I thought the wind had quartered till a peep at the binnacle showed me that our course had been changed, and the *Silver Sea*, with the weather clew of her mainsail up and two topgallant sails set, was driving along with a stately swing.

"There she is, Mr. Aubyn," cried Pipes, levelling his telescope.

I stepped to the weather rail, and looking over, and straight ahead, saw a large steamer, lying athwart our hawse with her trysails, topsail, and topgallant sail set. She headed about north-east, but lay apparently without more life in her than she got from the sea she bowed. She had the English ensign hoisted, and some flags were flying from her mainmast head; though they were only visible through Pipes's glass, for she would probably be between two and a half and three miles distant from us at that time.

"What will be her tonnage, captain?" I asked.

"Nothing under three thousand, sir."

"And her signal?"

"That she wants to speak us."

"What is the matter with her, do you think? A breakdown?"

"That, or a plate's dropped off her bottom," he answered. "There's no limit to what may befall those metal concerns, what with split-headed rivets, and cement, and iron one remove from the ore and brittle as glass. And fancy a ship putting to sea rigged like *that*! Look at her spread of canvas! Why, it's only fit for a man to blow his nose upon. Sails do they call 'em! Why, poor Mrs. Pipes, was she living, wouldn't buy 'em for dusters—they wouldn't be big enough for her."

Heading as we were, it gave one a stiff neck to keep her in sight; so I handed the glass to Pipes and joined Edwards and the others.

"Another little excitement," said I, "though not a derelict this bout, colonel. We've had a week's rest. It's about time that an incident happened."

"Fancy a man of Aubyn's age sleeping in the afternoon," exclaimed Hornby. "Miss Edwards, I found him snoring, I assure you."

"Snoring is a sign of an easy conscience," said I, with a glance at the colonel.

"Oh, Mr. Aubyn, you may well look at my husband," cried Mrs. Inglefield. "He snores terribly."

"There's not a quieter sleeper in the world," shouted the colonel, "than I am. I know it for a fact. Why, if I snored as my wife says, I'd wake myself up."

"I only know this," said Mrs. Inglefield; "if I had my time over again and a man proposed to me, my first question would be, Do you snore? I am sure the habitual snoring of husbands is the cause of the nervousness and hysteria you find among married women. I *hope* you don't snore, Mr. Aubyn; if you do, you really oughtn't to marry, you know."

"Mr. Hornby thinks he knows the steamer we are approaching, Mr. Aubyn," said Miss Edwards, changing the subject, after listening to Mrs. Inglefield with a slight lifting of her dark eyebrows. I was always amused when she cut the rope on which the colonel's wife postured. She'd do it in a manner that was not a little significant, like saying indeed, "The woman grows unsafe, and must be stopped."

"I can't be sure yet," exclaimed the little shipowner, "but I fancy she's a steamer called the *Empress*. If so, her destination will be an Australian port, and she'll be richly freighted and full of passengers, and all that sort of thing, don't you know."

"I don't believe in steamers," cried the colonel. "They're fast, and that's their merit, but if the screw breaks, or anything happens to the engines, you're done. Now a man doesn't like to be done. He wants resources. In a sailing ship, if your mast snaps you can stick up another and shamble along to a port; but in a steamer, if the engines won't go, then you stop dead, and there you are, perhaps a thousand of you, in the middle of the sea, in a cistern that won't sail."

"Nothing ominous, I hope, in the apparition of *that* vessel, colonel," said Mr. Edwards, laughing, and lazily enjoying his cigar.

"Pooh, pooh, Edwards; you're always sneering, man. Ominous! hang it, if omens depended upon my faith in 'em, there'd be none. One would fancy, to hear your jokes, by George, that this was my first voyage, confound it."

"Well, what I say is, I don't care what sights you show me, so long as they are not dead bodies," observed Mrs. Inglefield.

"How long will it take us to reach the steamer?" asked Miss Inglefield.

"About twenty minutes," said I. And then, catching, through a glass I picked up, a fair glimpse of the vessel's enlarging form over our bows, as the *Silver Sea* dipped into the hollow of a surge running ahead of her, I added: "If the black line along her sides signifies human heads, she's full of people."

"All in a nice fright, I dare say," exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield.

"That'll depend upon what's happened to her," observed Hornby.

"Well, I should be in a nice fright if this ship stood still one day and refused to sail, though there was plenty of wind," cried the lady.

"I should consider that our not being able to move was quite enough happen, I can assure you."

"You're safer on board the *Silver Sea* than ever you could be in our own home," said Hornby. "But you wouldn't believe it at first, Mrs. Inglefield."

"Charley made one afraid; he was so nervous himself, you know," said she, with one of those rolling, languishing looks around, as if she were sure we all considered her irresistible whenever she chose to be quite candid and girlish, which I then thought and still think the most ridiculous thing I ever beheld in a woman. The colonel was about to shout out some denial of this, but his voice was drowned by Pipes roaring an order that was immediately repeated in a bull-like bellow from Mr. Semple. Aft tumbled a number of hands, with plenty of excitement in their lurchings and twirlings, and hauled up the mainsail: then the topgallant sails were clewed down ready for setting again with the halliards only, and the upper mizzen topsail yard lowered. This was done, I suppose, that we might pass under the steamer's stern slowly, and then heave to under little canvas, that our drift might be as small as possible.

There is something not a little exciting in coming across a great steamer lying helpless and full of people far out at sea. One readily understands the spectacle of a sailing ship, big or little, abandoned or sinking, or waterlogged, for, as a rule, the injury will be plain; some of her spars are gone, or her sails are in rags, or a story may be got from broken bulwarks and littered decks; but a large, handsome, powerful ocean steamer, majestically pitching helplessly, and with scarce steerage way on her, encounters you like a conundrum. Everything looks right; nothing is wrong aloft, or numerous boats are all in their places, she might be a small town for the crowds moving about her decks—what ails her, then? To be sure you may reckon that there has been some failure in her propelling mechanism, but you cannot see the damage; what lies before you is a long, handsome ocean steamer, glossy and gleaming; in the hour when she left her dock-berth, and it's the thought there's as much a wreck in her way as a dismantled sailing ship would be, that, coming into one's perception of her completeness and polish as a fabric, renders the first sighting of such a craft a sort of riddle.

The steamer we were now close to was by no means a beauty. She had a straight stem and gigantic hawse-pipes, that might have issued for the dilated nostrils of some sea-beast, but what she lacked in beauty she made up for with suggestions of power. She was over four hundred feet long, and was painted a dead black, which the wash of the sea would leave in spaces wet and gleaming for the sunlight to sparkle in, and right along her sides there went two tiers of small circular portholes or scuttles which, as the

steamship slowly pitched, would one after another catch the flying sunshine and flash it back like a broadside discharge of cannon; the effect indeed was as though the iron shape was full of white fire. She had ten or twelve yellow boats, and these, with her funnel, charthouse, flying bridge, skylights, deckhouses, ventilators, and the like, gave her an uncomfortably crowded appearance. Little Hornby proved right; for one of the first details I caught sight of was the name *Empress* on her bow. Her small canvas tugged hard at the monkey spars and slender yards, and there was a stay foresail, or whatever else it might be called, doing its best forward, but now one could see from the narrow stretch of oily smoothness on her weather side that, close-hauled as she was, if she was going through the water at all, it was little more than broadside on. Lively as the sea was for a vessel of the size of our ship, the motion of the steamer was just a long, slow, majestic bowing, never so much as to expose an inch of her propeller blades. There were times when a surge would recoil in a hill of foam from her bow, as though it had struck a rock, and the dimensions of the billows could be marked as they ran their glittering, sun-touched folds along her black length without altering the slow, pendulum-like heaving of the massive metal structure.

Whatever the matter might be with her, it was plain that our approach was awaited with anxiety. Her rail was lined with heads, and for my part I found a very solemn significance in her when I looked at those scores of men, women, and children, and thought how all that stood between them and eternity were a few iron plates.

"Talk of the responsibilities of merchant captains?" I exclaimed to Hornby. "Just think of the load of life lying on the back of the commander of that steamer—the weight on the shoulders of one man!"

"True, very hard!" he replied. "And think also of the value of the ship and her cargo, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

"Ay, but one wants to have the soul of an underwriter, Hornby, to allow *that* to weigh in considering the safety of a craft with five or six hundred souls in her."

"Well," said he, "if that ship's good for a penny, you may value her and her cargo, as you see her, at £120,000. Isn't that money enough to weigh? Put it into a sack and try and lift it, Aubyn."

"Didn't I always say that Hornby was a poet?" exclaimed Edwards, laughing.

"I like Mr. Hornby's practical views, though," said Mrs. Inglefield.

"*So do I!*" shouted the colonel. "I object to sentiment. Give *me facts*. There's reality in £120,000. But sentiment!—sentiment!"

ment's poetry—only fit for girls, as the men who write it are evidently aware, since most of them wear their hair long as if they were women."

Hornby rounded upon me with a bright triumphant eye, and then peeped at Miss Edwards, to see perhaps whether she appreciated his views and the advocacy they had won. Both she and Miss Inglefield were intent upon the steamer; indeed there was too much to look at to admit of an argument, for Pipes had taken up a position ready for hailing, whilst Mr. Bird and Mr. Semple were "standing by" ready to transmit the necessary orders for heaving the ship to. Much the same kind of manœuvring I have told of when describing the abandoned barque and ship, was employed now. Pipes headed the *Silver Sea* as close under the stern of the great steamer as he durst go. The captain of her, as one might suppose, a tall man in a frock coat and brass buttons and naval cap, was right aft with a speaking-trumpet in his hand; another fellow in twinkling buttons stood near. But the crowds looking over the rails did not spread farther than the main shrouds, though as our ship went rolling past, with the helm hard down for a round-to to leeward, you saw the heads of the people like a dense swarm of crows lift away and vanish from the starboard side and come crowding and throbbing to port. Pipes was the first to hail, and he delivered himself of the loudest roar I had yet heard proceed from his lips.

"*Empress*, ahoy!"

"Hallo?"

"What is wrong with you?"

"Our main shaft is broken," responded the tall brass-bound man, delivering the reply through his tube. "I will send a boat if you'll heave to."

There was not too much sea on for that, and it was the best thing he could do; for round as cleverly as we would, the *Silver Sea* was well to leeward and ahead of the steamer before her liveliness had been deadened by the backed topsails, and the distance became with serious suddenness too great to render conversation easy, more especially to Pipes, who had the whole weight of the wind to send his voice through.

"Main shaft broken, eh?" cried little Hornby, who was in a high state of excitement, and who stumped about in a narrow circle like a sailor before he settles away into a jig. "Why, she'll be as useless as a bathing-machine that's gone adrift. "Pipes!" he sang out, "we shall be asked to tow—we shall be asked to tow, Pipes. By the powers, I see a few thousand pounds in this job, Edwards."

"Thousands!" exclaimed Edwards.

"Well, hundreds; hundreds make thousands, man!" piped the little fellow, chafing his hands and frisking about.

"But, confound it!" bawled the colonel, "you're not going to tell

me, Hornby, that the *Silver Sea's* capable of tugging that monster along?"

"Isn't she, isn't she! Why, she'll run her forward half as fast as her own engines could drive her," cried Hornby, with a rapturous face, and every money-making instinct working in him like pulses.

Miss Edwards came to my side at the rail where I leaned looking at the steamer.

"Is it true," said she, "as Mr. Hornby says, that we could tow her?"

"Oh, certainly; tow her easily; with wind, of course. And that is what they are going to ask us to do."

"To what place could we tow her?"

"Probably they'll request us to tow them to Madeira, or help them along in that direction till a steamer willing to take her hawser is met."

"Oh, it would be delightful to go to Madeira," said the gentle voice of Miss Inglefield on my right hand.

"We ought to be able to do what we please," I exclaimed. "These are the interests of the sea, and just what we want to make the voyage lively."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WE TAKE THE STEAMER IN TOW.

It was a sight to watch the great vessel, whilst her people lowered one of the large yellow boats, standing black and massive on our weather beam like some huge marine animal disabled by the loss of its fins. All along her rails there was a constant sinuous movement of the dark line of heads threaded with the glimmering white of faces. The sun was still high, the wind blew fresh and steady, but the rolling clouds were swelling their bulk, and those parts of them which were turned from the sun wore a slate-coloured shadow that gave them a squally look. The running ridges of the surges were a hard green when clear of the vapour-swept golden flashing in the south-west, and their shapes rose and fell against the far-off sky with edges as sharply cut as those of hills seen in frosty weather. Betwixt us and the steamer a shoal of porpoises were showing their black wet backs as they went shearing head to wind with a curve through the white foam and a vanishing of their gleaming jet in a green hollow; and twice on our weather quarter there was a sparkling of flying fish shooting like silver arrows from the heart of one melting slant into another.

But what one cared to look at most was the steamer slowly

balancing her length upon the seas, lifting her metal stem till the white froth sluicing down the black plates might have passed for a salival draining from those grinning hawseholes in her bows, and the low funnel and slender masts, and every rope between, with the ensign staff over her stern, and the figures upon her bridge, and the signal flags still streaming at the masthead, all standing out with startling and exquisite clearness against the windy flowing of the sunlight behind, that was as a curtain of yellow brightness for her to show herself against. But it also gave an added brilliancy to every colour in her, from the creamy white of her canvas shaded softly at the foot of each sail, and the coarse hue of the funnel and the fiery gold veining her bright masts, and the faint leeward lustres that came gleaming off the windows of deckhouses, and the rows of scuttles along her side, down to the tints of the costumes of the women mixed up with the grey and black of the crowds who watched us from the very eyes of the vessel to as far aft as the wheelhouse.

"Is she an emigrant ship?" asked Miss Inglefield.

"She would not be called so, perhaps," said I, "though I dare say she'll be full of what is termed steerage passengers."

"How many people do you imagine there are, in all, aboard of her?" inquired Miss Edwards.

"Three or four hundred, I dare say."

"One can understand why shipwreck is more dreadful in these days than in other times," she exclaimed musingly. "I should hate to be in a crowded ship. The mere sense of numbers, not to speak of the thought of the scene the decks would present in a time of danger, would make the sea too threatening for endurance, no matter how calm and beautiful it might be."

"How buoyant that boat is!" cried Miss Inglefield. "She is like my poor gull flying with a message. Any one can see that she is as full of eagerness as if she were alive, and—and—," pointing to the boat and looking at me with her blue eyes, she faltered and stopped, with a bit of pink in her cheeks that made the glance which fell drooping extremely sweet. Why was she so bashful, I wondered? Was it her mother's fault that this girl would break down in her speech, as though the consciousness that she deserved a rebuke for opening her lips alarmed and confused her? I peered at her fair hair and white throat, and gentle delicate face, on which lay habitually a maidenly purity of expression that was like a kind of pensiveness, especially when she was still and thinking, but the boat was coming along in fast floating bounds, and one felt too much interested in what was going to be said and happen, for thoughts which had no reference to the incident under our noses.

She was a big powerful lifeboat. Six oars swept her towards us, and she was steered by the man I had noticed twinkling near the

steamer's captain when he hailed us. One might have taken him for a naval officer from the fashion of his cap and the cut of his coat, and his buttons and the rings around his sleeves. Upon my honour I know nothing more degrading to the merchant service than this monkeyfication of royal naval airs and costumes by mates and skippers. I don't say it is their fault ; the steamship companies they serve force them into these imitation uniforms ; but nevertheless it is offensive, objectionable, and humiliating. I only hope naval officers are aware that these liveries are made a condition of service by shipping companies, and that most of the merchant officers who have to figure in man-of-war cut clothes, would stump their bridges or quarter decks with more of the seamanlike pride their forefathers took in their calling were they, like the old race of merchantmen, suffered to keep themselves warm with pilot-cloth and cool with plain serge.

The boat came to leeward of us, the end of a rope was chucked to the fellow in the bows, and she was brought to the gangway, where, well protected with fenders and held clear with a boat-hook, she rose and fell securely in the shelter of our lee. Pipes received the officer in buttons, who was a good-looking sunburnt young fellow, with a reddish beard and a pleasant expression of face. They held a short conversation, during which Pipes would swing his square countenance round to have a look at the steamer, as though measuring her with his eye, after which he brought him over to us.

"This is the owner of the ship, sir, Mr. Wellesley Hornby ; Mr. Hornby, this gentleman is first mate of yonder steamer, and comes with a message from her master," said the old fellow, flourishing his arms and gazing round to let us understand, as I took it, that the introduction to Hornby was to answer for us all. The mate raised his cap.

"What is the message ?" inquired Hornby.

"Captain Lovell wishes to know, sir, if your ship will give our disabled steamer a tow to Madeira ? The distance is not great ; your detention therefore would not be long. He makes no offer for the service, but proposes that the value of it should be settled ashore in the usual way."

Hornby's eye brightened, and one saw him struggling with an emotion of delight.

"Well, you know," said he, "we're quite capable of towing you, big as you are, but it's hardly for me to decide. It is true that this is my ship, but I am merely a guest on board ; I have placed her at the disposal of my friend Mr. Edwards"—here a bow took place between Edwards and the mate—"and," continued the little man, turning his bright eyes on Miss Edwards and the other ladies, "*it is for him and his guests, my friends, to say what shall be done.*"

"If the steamer's in distress," said Edwards, "our duty's plain : we must help her."

"Our main shaft is broken," exclaimed the mate, "and the steamer's canvas barely gives us command over her."

"How long would it take to tow the vessel to Madeira?" demanded the colonel, shouting as though he were hailing the fore-castle.

"The distance is within four hundred miles," said the mate.

"We're a clipper ship, you know, colonel," observed Pipes, who saw his cue in Hornby's eager eye, and anxious, hopeful flitting ; "with anything of a breeze we'll be running that steamer along as fast as a couple of tugs could manage it."

"It'll take about three days, I suppose," cried the colonel.

"Say four," said I, laughing. Hornby grinned reproachfully at me.

"There'll be no danger, will there?" inquired Mrs. Inglefield, eyeing the mate.

"Oh dear no, madam," he replied very politely, and with a proper saloon smile.

"I see no objection," said Mr. Edwards. "Those people can't be left helpless."

"That's just it : you see it's an appeal to our humanity and all that sort of thing, don't you know," exclaimed little Hornby. "What'll be the value of that fine steamer, now—she and her cargo?"

"I couldn't tell you off-hand, sir," responded the mate. "The figure should be over a hundred thousand pounds."

Hornby's eyes met in a squint in Pipes' square face. I had before noticed that in certain moods Hornby squinted.

"We have four hundred and sixty-nine passengers on board, and one hundred of a crew, all told."

"Lor' bless me !" cried Pipes. "Think of that now for a crowd."

"*That* should settle it, papa," said Miss Edwards in her clear decisive voice.

The mate took a peep full of admiration at her, and Hornby cried briskly, "We must all obey Miss Edwards. Since she wishes it, let it be done. Please step below with me," to the mate : "Pipes, come you along. Better have a written agreement and all that sort of thing, don't you know."

"I don't much like the notion of dragging that big ship," said Edwards, as the three disappeared, lighting a cigar and indolently contemplating the steamer. "In fact I can't see how we're to move such a lump. But it wouldn't do to stand in the way of Hornby's making money. This is his vessel, and he has acted very liberally in placing her at our disposal."

"A ship incurs no particular risk in towing another, does she, Anbyn?" said the colonel.

"Not if she's properly handled."

"For instance, there's no chance of that steamer coming after us faster than we're going, and cutting us down, eh! Damned awkward thing to befall us, if it happened. Look at her bows: a regular chopper, by George. If she struck us we shouldn't know what hurt us—it would be all over in a moment," cried the colonel, with the manner of one who would have us believe that he didn't care, though it was his duty to point out the possibilities of disaster to his friends.

"Charley," exclaimed his wife, "you know it's that kind of talk which makes me nervous; and then you put it upon me, and say if you're timid it's only for my sake."

"I don't see how that steamer can hurt us," said Mr. Edwards. "I suppose we shall be separated from her by the distance of a pretty long rope."

"Oh yes," said I, "there is nothing to fear."

"What a handsome young man the officer is who has gone downstairs," exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield. "Really," she added with a giggle, "one would quite like to be a passenger in that steamer."

"You'll have the colonel thrusting him overboard, if you talk in that way," said Edwards, laughing.

"How much will Mr. Hornby make, papa, if he succeeds in towing the steamer to Madeira?" asked Miss Edwards.

"He speaks of thousands. He may be right. After all we'll be saving her; for if her engines are useless, what on earth is she to do with sails that don't look big enough to waft a fishing boat along?"

"How noble the picture grows as the sunshine gets redder," said Miss Inglefield in her timid way. "It makes me feel that drawing and even painting are very stupid."

"So they are," exclaimed the colonel; "never could see, myself, the use of imitations, when, confound it, you've only to look in front of your nose to behold the real thing. I've watched people half delirious with admiration over a portrait, with the original of it looking on. Why don't they grow half delirious over the flesh and blood reality, instead of over a few foot of canvas covered with paint, which can't talk, look, think, breathe, or anything else, hang it!"

Miss Edwards laughed so heartily at this, that I turned it over afresh, thinking it must hold something that hit Mrs. Inglefield; but I found nothing adaptable to that lady. Hornby, followed by Pipes and the mate, now arrived.

"Well, have you settled matters?" inquired Mr. Edwards.

"Yes," cried the little fellow, "we're to tow and all that sort of thing, don't you know, as far as Madeira. If we meet with a steamer willing to tow, why then, all right; she'll take up the work and we'll *proceed*."

The mate, saluting us with a flourish of his cap, walked to the gangway accompanied by Pipes, and there for five minutes they stood arranging the necessary manœuvres, Pipes flourishing his arms and beating the palm of his left hand with his right fist, and the mate agreeing, with frequent nods and many a look aloft, as if calculating over our sail power. He then went over the side, the boat shoved off, and Pipes returned to us.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "just think of that steam-boat having been three days and nights in that quandary. In all that time they've only sighted one small vessel. Would anybody believe it of an ocean like this, that's commonly supposed to be covered with craft of all kinds all the year round?"

"Where is she carrying all those people to?" inquired Edwards.

"To Australian and New Zealand ports," answered Hornby. "It's wonderful to think of the shoals of people who leave Great Britain for America and other places week after week—wonderful!"

"I'll tell you what's more wonderful, Hornby," bawled the colonel, "and that is, all the emigration that goes on leaves us thicker and more crowded at home. There was room for a man when I was young, but now—why, hang it, you can't turn! There's an elbow in every rib, a fellow standing on each foot, and growing children betwixt your legs shoving you, by jingo, clean up out of it altogether."

"Yes, we multiply too fast," said Edwards, complacently. "Fact is, there are not enough wars and shipwrecks."

"Let there be wars," exclaimed Hornby, "but we'll not look upon shipwrecks as being useful till we get home; eh, Miss Edwards? Mustn't dream of such things, you know."

She was watching the boat making for the steamer, and returned no answer. There was much to look at, but for my part I found her so beautiful just then that I keep on peering at her as if she, and not the picture out upon the sea, were the transitory object. One thought of her as a kind of sea-queen, the possessor of such regality of beauty as made the mighty girdle of the deep the fittest frame conceivable for her. It would be a fancy inspired or helped just then by her erect posture at the rail as she gazed seawards, the proud bearing of a figure whose grace made every movement and gesture a pride in her, unconscious as she was of it; and then the light of the reddening sun lay upon her face and eyes, the strong wind tossed her hair, and you saw her nostrils dilate, and her bosom swelling to it; and, again, there was the ocean movement of her form, the rhythmic rise and fall of the surges in the lifting and sinking of her against sea and sky. Beside her leaned *Miss Agnes upon the rail*, watching the boat with her blue eyes,

which softened or gleamed at its tossings and vanishings with a child-like sympathy that one should have found touching enough. The clouds were flying fast, and as the boat reached the steamer's side the wind breezed up in a puff that made one instinctively look aloft at our backed topsail; it slackened down again, but I was pretty sure, from a dinness in the east and the vapourish blue of the sky, and a particular sort of spitefulness in the snapping of the seas against our side, that we were to have a repetition of our midday blow with a piece added on. It was easy to see that both Pipes and Mr. Bird had much the same fancy; but it would have been cruel to challenge their opinion in the face of Hornby's eagerness that the *Silver Sea* should tow the great ocean boat.

The manœuvring that followed betwixt our ship and the steamer stopped any inclination we might have had to talk. A few minutes after the mate of the *Empress* had returned to her a cheer came down upon the wind. Fore and aft the news had flown that we were willing to tow, and the cheer was the people's greeting of it and of us. It startled and saddened one to hear it somehow; thrice it rolled down to us, distance making but a single human voice, and faint, too, of the blended shouts of those hundreds of throats, and along the whole dark line of heads and figures you'd see what might have passed for a passionate throbbing, like fevered blood pulsing through a vein, as the people waved hat and handkerchief, and swayed to their own hurrahs. Well, if they had passed three days and nights in that situation, sighting no vessels, making no headway, and lying as helpless and useless as if the four thousand ton fabric under them were an old timber-raft, a good many amongst them would be anxious enough, I dare say.

The wind was east-south-east, with a southerly tendency, and the island of Madeira would bear about east by north, and half a point perhaps to the north of that: this I got from Mr. Semple. Consequently our first drag would be hard upon two points off the proper course, and perhaps more, for one would hardly expect a ship with a steamer over four hundred feet long in tow to look up as she would if she hugged the wind with nothing but her own shape. Yet it was not this that caused one to think that hopeful cheering premature. What I could not believe was that the weather was going to let us hold the steamer. She lay some distance away upon our weather quarter, pitching quietly and solemnly, but shortly after her mate had climbed aboard her, she eased off her sheets, shifted her helm, and headed for us. This frightened the colonel. He jumped up and roared out, "Hallo! what the deuce are they up to? Why, confound it, she'll be into us in a few minutes!"

"No, no," cried Pipes; "it's all right, sir. She's bound to

approach us and send us a line; but I'll take care not to let her come too close," he added, with a look at the crew who were stationed at the main braces ready to fill on the ship when the order should be given.

"Well, please mind your eye, hang it!" bawled the colonel. "She's got the wind with her, remember. She's not to be stopped easily, by jingo. She won't be quick to answer her helm with that canvas on her, by George—so look out!" he roared, to the amusement of the hands stationed at the braces, amongst whom I noticed our huge friend the Finn, standing with a lounging, loafing, lazy air, but with such a grin upon his extraordinary face that his eyes, nose, and mouth looked overwhelmed with wrinkles, like sand smothered by the ripples of a tide.

The steamer kept her boat alongside with a hand in her, but that suggested nothing; and supposing that she meant to range alongside of us, to enable our people to catch the end of a line to drag her hawser on board with, I began to feel a little fidgety; for the colonel was perfectly right in pointing out that her canvas was too insignificant to permit any decent sort of handling of her, and as we were rolling and pitching pretty smartly, plunging our bows down into the trough and chopping out the froth as though we were sailing through the green roller, and then lurching with a lean to windward that shrilled the screaming aloft into ear-piercing sounds, why, I felt that if we got too near under the lee of the lumping height and length of iron that was steadily heading for us, we might find ourselves in a very ugly mess indeed; for at sea a thing becomes serious in a minute. But Pipes and the captain of the steamer knew more about it than the colonel or I; which is as good as saying that landsmen never make greater fools of themselves than when they criticize the professional behaviour of seamen.

The huge vessel was still at a respectable distance from us when she put her helm hard down, rounding so slowly that we wondered how she managed to come up at all; but it was a fine sight to follow the great length drawing out, inch by inch, the seas bursting in smoke away from her bows, and the hurry of the glittering water glancing and shivering in her wet metal sides, and the whole immense frame, with its crowds of faces and heavy superstructures and cliff-like stem topped by a flourish of gilt, gravely bowing whilst with head sheets flowing and topsail shivering and main trysail flat aft, she floated to windward as imperceptibly as if her head were being warped that way by a few men. Some fellows now tumbled into her boat again, her third or fourth mate took the chief officer's place in the stern sheets, and down she came to us with the end of a line in her, whose length swung thin and black upon the seas that ran betwixt us and the steamer. It was thrown up to us and caught and hauled on, whilst you saw the great wire

hawser they were going to send gliding over the tall iron bows into the sea like a serpent escaping. To a certain extent this job was facilitated by Pipes and the other skipper so handling their respective vessels as to bring them a trifle closer together and getting them into position. This was done by the steamer putting her helm up, and by our rounding in the lee maintopsail braces to shiver the sails, that we might forge ahead and to windward a bit ; so that in this manner we got the steamer pretty close to us on our weather quarter whilst a portion of our crew were dragging upon the hawser.

There was something in the way in which Pipes performed his part of this undertaking that made one see what a good sailor he was.

A circus-rider could not have done more with his tractable and sagacious horse than our skipper did with the *Silver Sea*; there was no flurry nor hurry either, no hoarse yelling, though the condition of the weather might have excused noise and scrambling both; for the wind was steadily freshening, the seas gained in velocity and volume, and our ship plunged and rolled heavily upon the surges whose weight was beginning to tell upon the big steamer, as you'd see by the rise of her bows and the slope of her spars and funnel, as though she were *now* understanding what was going on, and was tossing her head with contempt as she peered through her hideous yawning hawse-pipes at the little sailing ship that was going to tow her. There was some delay, however ; for the mate standing up in the eyes of her yelled to us that two hawsers would be needed, and it was pretty nearly dinner time before the ends of both tow-lines were aboard and secured right forward to the windlass bitts, for we had no mooring bollards on the main deck, and Pipes shook his head when Mr. Bird suggested the mainmast. But nobody thought of dinner ; we were all too much interested and excited to feel hungry. The red wet sunshine came flying down past a roll of smoke-like cloud in the west, and flashed a wild light along the seething deep whose dark green looked dim in the spray that was blowing out of every head of snow when Pipes gave the order to fill on the ship. But when with her yards braced sharp up and her maintopgallant sail set, with hands shinning up the foretopgallant rigging to roll up the sail there, our brave little clipper felt the swelling pressure and heeled to it for one of her glorious headlong floating rushes, whilst the massive bights astern of her lifted streaming out of the billows, you felt the tremendous check she received run through her with a wild thrill, and you would have sworn that the noble and shapely little fabric trembled with the terror of that fierce and massive arrest as a racehorse quivers when startled by fright or pain. It was the sharpest resemblance to the *passion or feeling of a living thing that ever came from an inanimate object.*

Slowly the huge steamer came into our wake, with trysails set and square canvas furled. Oh for the brush of a Turner to give you the colour in that picture! Over her port quarter was the crimson sun shooting its misty beams down between the careering clouds into the sea, that would leap and foam in a weltering dazzle under the wild light, and then darken into a sullen dusky olive-colour beneath the shadow of a body of squally vapour flying into the west-north-west athwart the pale green sky; and betwixt those startling alternations of red brilliance and savage gloom was the steamer following in our wake, and looking as if she would run us down, laboriously rising her iron bows till the bights of the hawsers lifted hissing out of the surges, then stooping them and throwing up plain to us the length of her deck to the taffrail, with figures on the slender bridge and crowds of men and women watching us over the rail, and a fellow at the wheel on the high platform steering by steam. Why, what can a man make of such a sight with a pen? How can I paint the swelling white of foam at that metal cutwater, the crystal rain bursting in showers from her bows, and ever and anon catching a blood-red hue from the sun, till one would have said the repulsed surge had been smitten into rubies, the dance of radiance along her decks and the subtle diamond-like flash from her side when a swerve of the rising bow snatched a light for the glass of a scuttle off the illuminated waters?

But we were towing her. They waited before they shouted; and then down came the faint thunder of another cheer, and all around her bows you saw the vibration of waving hands as our noble clipper, straining like a high-spirited racehorse harnessed to a waggon, sent the head seas slinging along her weather side in froth, whilst she sprang to the foaming slants after every rude arrest of the hawsers with a kind of frenzy, leaning down to it with such fierce determination you'd have thought she was being goaded into madness by the mocking laughter of the wind and the brutal elbowing of the surges.

Edwards now gave us to know that he was hungry; it was long past the usual dinner time, and already ten minutes had elapsed since the steward came to Mr. Hornby with a final message that the soup was fast disappearing in steam, and that the fowls were barely more than rags as it was. The shelter of the cabin was not a little welcome. One did not feel the need of it whilst watching the big steamer and our leaning and struggling clipper, but when the saloon was entered, one got a sense that the wind was mighty strong on deck, and damp with the spray-like haze on the sea, even if it were not cold, and that it was pleasant to be for a while without the thunder of it in one's ears, and the long lungings and thrustings and plunging of it against one's body.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WILD NIGHT.

PIPES remained on deck ; he told Mr. Hornby that he would get his dinner later on ; he wanted to tend the ship now, and watch the behaviour of the fellow astern a bit. The little shipowner therefore took the skipper's chair, and with appetites sharpened by delay, we gathered round the table. The cabin lamps were lighted, and swung their brilliance here and there like a signal torch in the grasp of a motioning seaman. The light was needed, for though the sun was not yet gone, the shadows of the innumerable clouds which streamed large and dark across the sky flung an evening gloom upon the deep that came very near to darkness in the cabin. Hornby's high spirits were infectious, and made us all willing to find something agreeable in our situation.

"Who'd suppose now," cried he, peering with one eye through a glass of sherry, "that there was over a hundred thousand pounds' worth of property in tow of this ship, actually dependent upon us, and I may say, for its preservation ; for who's going to guess what might befall that steamer, were she left to her own wretched resources ? Upon my word, it's an animating idea."

"It's more animating to feel that we're helping the poor people in her," said Miss Inglesfield.

"Oh, certainly," cried Hornby. "Poor things ! It'll be a very soothing, amiable memory," said he, looking at Miss Edwards, "and all that sort of thing, don't you know, to recall this adventure, and reflect that a gallant steamer and her cargo, worth together over a hundred thousand pounds, and the great number of souls on board of her, owe their preservation to us."

"D'ye feel, though, how those big ropes stop the *Silver Sea* ?" exclaimed Edwards. "The jerks give one an odd feeling."

"All imagination, Edwards ; all imagination," answered Hornby. "Jerks ! why, the oscillations of a swing couldn't be more regular."

"I don't know about that," shouted the colonel. "May seem regular to you, Hornby, but it's deuced lumpy to my notion : as if some giant was driving the ship forward by giving her a kick with his foot every minute or two. Eh, Aubyn ? By George, I don't fancy that simile's to be improved upon ; it describes the sensation exactly."

"There's no doubt," said I, "that the check the ship receives now and then from the tautening of the tow-lines may be felt, but it's nothing to mind."

"Nothing, if it is to be felt," exclaimed Hornby, "though it's odd that I can't detect the lumpiness you speak of, colonel,"

cocking his head on one side as if trying to distinguish the movement we were speaking of.

"If I were to pick up a bag of gold, Hornby, there'd be no weight in it to inconvenience me, nothing to cause me to complain of it as a burden," said Edwards, laughing. "I'll tell you how to make every one of us think this jerky lumping delightful. Consent to divide the award you may get amongst us all. I'll warrant that remedy."

"Yes," cried the colonel, "that's a receipt that will instantly calm the ocean. It would act better than oil."

Hornby laughed uproariously; he did not intend that this should be anything but a joke of the highest order.

"How old should you take the mate of the steamer to be?" said Mrs. Inglefield, addressing no one in particular. "Not more than thirty-five, I should think. If all sailors were as good-looking, what a delightful race they would be."

"I never met an ugly sailor," said her daughter softly.

"Here and there one, my dear. Pipes now—an excellent seaman and a good-hearted man—but as a beauty, you know?" said Mr. Edwards.

"Yes; but I mean there is the open, sunny look of the sea in sailors' faces; the honesty and freshness of it, Mr. Edwards; that has nothing to do with features, though it gives the beauty of manliness to them," said the girl, in her hesitating way, and blushing to find herself speaking and everybody listening.

"What *do* you know about it, Agnes?" interrupted Mrs. Inglefield petulantly. Besides, it is not *quite* a subject for—"and she gave her daughter a hurried frown, and then went on eating with her customary bland face.

"I thoroughly understand what you mean, Agnes," said Miss Edwards, running her eyes, with a half-derisive flash in them, from the mother to the daughter, on whom they settled with a delightful softness. "The sea *does* ennoble to this extent at all events, that the ugliness of a sailor is handsome compared with the same type of ugliness in a landsman. It is the sunburnt cheek perhaps, the easy rolling walk, the breath of the sea in the sparkle of his eyes; and then he is helped by one's knowing him to follow what I told you, Mr. Aubyn, I considered the manliest calling in the world."

She looked at Mrs. Inglefield, who with a smirk on her powdered face, was working at the leg of a fowl.

"Bravo!" cried Hornby. "I wish I was a sailor, I'm sure. Yes, I'd wear a sou'wester and jumper, and pull upon ropes and grease masts and all that sort of thing, don't you know, to be praised by you, Miss Edwards."

She laughed, and her papa smiled, and methought that Mrs. Inglefield glanced from her to Hornby and back again, as if she

were not ill-pleased that yonder queenly-looking girl should be exhibited as with a little creature not much bigger than a monkey at her feet. Heavens! how fond women are of one another! When a lady is really loved and tenderly and honourably spoken of by her female friends, what are the qualities in her which work the miracle? It is certain that she mustn't be beautiful; charity will not help her; piety extenuates nothing; being a good wife, a devoted mother, will not avail. But avast! these are not speculations for the cabin of a labouring ship with an immense steamer in tow.

I should have thought it odd that the colonel made no fuss over this salvage job if I had guessed that he understood it as a sailor would. It was not surprising that Pipes should stick to the deck, and talk of getting his dinner by-and-by. The wind was freshening, and certain sounds had reached the cabin whilst we sat at dinner which intimated that sail was being shortened, the upper fore and mizzen topsails being reefed. The increasing strength of the seas was to be felt in the wilder lifting and sinking of one part of the ship, and heard in the stormy thunder of water roaring along the quarter and meeting with a shock under the counter that jarred and wrenched the rudder till you could sometimes hardly hear your voice amid the deepening clamour. Had the ship been free, there would have been nothing to think of in all this: it was not yet a gale of wind, though the booming above the skylights was like the voice of one; and it was only necessary to reflect upon the trim and staunchness of the ship to feel easy, no matter what fancies of weather occurred. But it was different when you sent your thoughts to the iron monster holding on to us, comparatively close astern, with her long wire feelers. I knew she'd be pitching pretty energetically now, and every hurling rise of our stem would strike up the image of those massive iron bows, that straight and deadly metal cutwater, soaring into gigantic proportions upon the fold of the sea into whose hollow we had swooped, and then shearing crushingly down with the force of hundreds of tons into the boiling trough, whose spray, had the gale been a following one, was near enough to hurl its salt upon our decks.

However, I was plainly alone in these reflections, and I took good care that they should not be suspected. The dessert was on the table—sea dessert of almonds and raisins, biscuits, preserved fruits and the like—when old Pipes came below to his dinner. Hornby made way for him, and Edwards called out, "Well, have we still got hold of the steamer?"

"Ay, sir; if the two vessels were man and wife, they couldn't be more firmly united."

"And we're dragging her too—making her walk, eh, Pipes?" exclaimed Hornby.

"Certainly we're dragging her, sir," responded the skipper, sign-

ng to the steward to be quick, "but as to making her walk why, t's like this, you see. First of all the head sea bothers the ship; hen we're close hauled and under small canvas, though as much as we need. Under such circumstances, there's not much to be expected of a sailing vessel with over four thousand tons to drag behind her."

"How looks the night, captain? Are we going to get more wind than we have?" I asked.

"Well, under these conditions, Mr. Aubyn," he replied, "a capful becomes a sackful. The moon looks clear enough when the clouds leave her visible; there's nothing wrong with *her*."

The evasiveness of this reply was as full an answer as I had a right to expect. He would not have spared the colonel, I believe, but Pipes was a courteous and considerate mariner, and was always regardful of the ladies' nerves. Without seeming to be in a hurry, he nevertheless got through his dinner with surprising swiftness. "There," he exclaimed, jumping up, "I fear, gentlemen, I've been keeping you from your cigars. I'll take another look round whilst Mr. Semple gets something to eat." And giving us one of his square hearty smiles, he pulled his fur cap over his head and went up the companion steps.

Before our cigars were smoked out, the colonel and Mr. Edwards fell asleep; Hornby joined the ladies, and I stepped aft to them to offer to escort any one or two of them on deck. Miss Edwards looked as if she had a mind to come, then with a little shiver said, "By-and-by, Mr. Aubyn, I'll take one peep at the steamer, but I've almost had enough of the wind for to-day."

"Will you come?" said I to Miss Inglefield.

"If I may," she replied, looking at her mother.

"Well, for ten minutes, Mr. Aubyn; not longer, if you please," replied Mrs. Inglefield.

I had not imagined that she would consent so readily. She might hope perhaps, that by pairing her daughter and me during the voyage, the absurdity of Hornby's attentions to Miss Edwards, viewing the thing as a mere question of stature, would be rendered more conspicuous. Anyhow, some such idea as this was in my mind as I stepped into my cabin for a pea-coat and a warm cap; for to speak the truth, Mrs. Inglefield was just one of those women whose motives, even in the most trumpery matters, you could never conjecture without suspicion.

Miss Agnes did not keep me waiting. I gave her my hand and we went on deck. Strong as the rolling and plunging of the ship seemed to be from the movement in the cabin, I should not have suspected from it that it was blowing so hard. It fairly took Miss Inglefield's breath away, and she clung to me as a child would, till I got her to windward under cover of the bulwarks and a quarter boat. *It cost one some blinking at first to see what was going on,*

after the bright glare below, but I soon had the wild picture plain—and wild it was. They had stowed the upper fore and mizzen topsail, but they were holding on with the single-reefed upper main-topsail, and under this canvas and a whole foresail, lower main-topsail, and foretopmost staysail, the ship was leaning down into the white smother to leeward, jumping and snapping at the seas, and straining with feverish leapings and tremblings at the metal bonds that held her to the huge shadowy fabric astern. Masses of dark clouds came sweeping headlong out of the sea over the port bow, advancing like immense bodies of smoke upon the moon, the thinner vapour turning white as it flew over her, whilst the denser expanses would plunge the ocean into a midnight gloom that brightened out into dim silver as the clouds glanced off the luminary, bearing with them in their skirts a fragment of phantom rainbow, as though in their passage they had brushed a colour or two from the face of the orb. The diving and swift swimming of the moon made the night look as stormy again as it was; for the sense of the gale was brought to the eye, as its thunder conveyed it to the ear, by the leaping of the silver-green planet from the edge of the clouds and the plunge of its wild and windy radiance into the foam, running in startling brilliance upon the rolling peaks of the black and hollow surges; for ere the cloud-eclipses came, the lustre poured down by the moon, floating in a broad rift of indigo, would flash up the whole circumference of the deep, the greenish light being helped by the masses of froth coiling over and seething in every direction: and from the dim ridged horizon rounding out of the pallid faintness the eye would come to the giant steamer in our wake, showing as clear as a drawing in ink upon the foam all about her, plunging *now* till she'd bury her monstrous hawseholes in the water which the heavy crushing blow of her stem would send boiling far ahead of her, then rearing her streaming bows for the moonlight to scatter itself against in sparkling icy fragments, and swelling up into twice her true dimensions in the vague illumination, with a regular solemn waving of her funnel and masts, as though she were some vast grotesque spirit of the deep beating time to the yelling orchestra of the wind, to whose music the billows were madly dancing, and the moon and stars among the cloud-ravines giddily whirling. But when the darkness fell and the moon dived into the heart of a mass of black vapour, and her light went out as though the breath of the gale had extinguished it, the melting of the monster in our wake into an immense and indistinguishable shadow erecting itself to peer at us through the green and red eyes on either side of it, and then plunging down with the very motion of a savage leap at our little straining craft, was something to startle one. Well astern as she *was*, the roaring of the water she divided more through her pitching *than from the drag* we were giving her would thunder steadily

through the gale to us and add a note of majestic deepness to the crashing and seething of the colliding surges around us. Our speed looked to be little more than a couple of knots. The sweeping of a white sea away from under our keel to the gloom beyond the quarter would be deceptive: but I could not be deceived. We were barely doing more than holding our own, and even that I thought wonderful; for whenever the hawsers tautened one expected to see the ship jerked back upon her heel, and for my part, had I seen the steamer's head pay off and draw us with our jibboom plump into the wind's eye, I should have reckoned it as natural a thing as could have happened.

There was many a small squall in the streaming clouds, and one drove down upon us shortly after Miss Agnes and I had gained the deck. It came in a sheet of mist and a glint of the moon upon it, and passed with a long shriek through the masts, every drop flying straight like a bullet from a rifle, and it veiled the steamer completely till it was past. However, my pretty companion and I were sheltered by the quarter boat, though I'd find the girl with a frightened look when the moon swept out and revealed her; she maintained her child-like grasp of my arm, and again and again I would feel the start she gave when our struggling ship, with her masts sloping into dimness and the squares of her canvas turning white and black as the radiance came and went, plunged her bows to the knightheads into the foam, and then swung with a long yearning shiver into the dark and yeasty hollow, as if she were growing sick and faint from her struggles to break clear of the enormous iron fabric that had grappled her with arms of steel.

"Rather a thrilling scene in its way, Miss Inglefield," said I, affected as a man's heart might well be by her tender and timid clinging and her scared glances.

"The sea never could look grander," she replied. "Oh, it would be beautiful without being terrible if we could only get rid of that great steamer there. Her nearness seems to alarm our poor ship, and I am sure it frightens me."

"She'll not hurt us. It's very fair that Mr. Hornby should be allowed to earn money with his own vessel; and then think how happy we are making those crowds yonder by dragging them to a place where they will be able to get their shaft repaired and proceed on their voyage."

"What a battlefield the sea is!" she exclaimed, not in the clear high notes of Miss Edwards, but in a voice that obliged me to keep my head close to hers to hear it; and that is how it was I came to notice the scared, half-awed look in her eyes, and why, for a long while afterwards, the memory of her white girlish face, tinged with the pearliness of the moonlight whenever the gale brought the lustre down into it, would occur to me as though it *was something I had seen in a dream*. "After all, people must be

very brave to venture on it. Look at those waves, Mr. Aubyn ! how they snap and rush after one another like maddened tigers. If they were tigers, who would venture his life among them ? And yet they're worse than tigers, aren't they—hungrier and crueller ?”

Her pretty little chatter flattered me. Among the others she never would have ventured upon so long a speech.

“Now,” said I, “I daresay you'll be glad when this voyage is over.”

“Indeed, no ; I am happy. One only wants to feel safe,” she answered, glancing at the steamer.

“At sea one should never think at all. Nothing should trouble one till it comes. The charm of the ocean lies in its power of abstracting a person from all shore troubles and habits. Look at this mighty scene of plunging ships, and rolling snow, and black heights of water ; why, if you think now of postmen, the electric telegraph, and tax collectors, and hansom cabs, and Italian singers, and such matters, it's like sending our mind to another world altogether. Ay, the place they belong to seems as distinct from this dusky hurling universe as that moon is up there.”

I saw her laughing, for her delicate merriment had no chance to make itself audible in the gale, and her lips were moving in some answer she was returning, when the screams of a squall coming sheer betwixt the rail and the keel of the boat, cut the words from her mouth as you'd snip a flower from its stem, and she cowered in silence against me with both hands locked on my arm. There was real spite in this outfly of smoking rain and yelling darkness, and the *Silver Sea* heeled to it till the white swell to leeward looked like a wall of snow standing up from the rail to the crossjack yardarm.

“Let go the upper maintopsail halliards !” roared Pipes. “Get another reef tied in it, Mr. Bird.”

A figure came staggering up the companion, and after peering about, approached us. It was the steward, to tell us that Mrs. Inglefield desired her daughter to go below. Whether she would have quitted the deck without that summons I don't know, but for my part the spell of wind had been long enough, and I at once handed Miss Inglefield to the companion, to the music of half a dozen of hoarse throats bawling at the reef tackles on the main deck.

“I said ten minutes, Mr. Aubyn,” exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield, “and yet you have kept Agnes on deck for quite half an hour.” But she did not seem very much annoyed.

“Oh, mamma, the sea is like hills topped with snow, and the moon springing in and out of the clouds makes the picture grand and glorious !” exclaimed Miss Agnes, who, white as she

looked on deck; had brought a little colour out of the wind in her cheeks to the cabin, whilst her eyes had a breezy sparkle in the lamplight.

"No doubt," said Mrs. Inglefield; "but go and take off your hat and jacket, my love, for I can see that it is raining."

"Merely a squall," said I. "Miss Edwards, you should witness a very beautiful picture whilst there is moonlight to see it by."

She declined, saying that the wind had already given her a slight headache. "Whilst there is moonlight, you say, Aubyn," exclaimed Edwards, who had ended his nap, though the colonel was snoring with his chin on his breast. "D'ye mean that the moon's setting?"

"No; but that the clouds are rolling up thick and fast."

"Not signifying more wind, I hope," said Hornby, with a look of anxiety in his small shining eyes.

"That's just what *is* signified, I think," I replied.

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield. "Is it not blowing quite fiercely enough already? I am sure I shall not be able to sleep to-night; I shall be tossed out of my bed. The sea is dreadfully rough."

Pipes came quietly down the steps from the deck, and entered his cabin. He reappeared in a few moments, and Hornby called him.

"Well, how do we get on, Pipes?"

"Why, sir, I hope it may not blow harder. There's nothing much to be done in a towing job under three close-reefed topsails and a head sea worritsome enough to jump a topgallant mast out of a ship," answered the old chap, talking with his fur cap in hand, which glistened with wet as he turned it round and round, with his eyes respectfully fixed on Hornby.

"Shall you be able to hold on to the steamer?" inquired the little man.

"Why, we oughtn't to let go if we can help it," replied Pipes. "But his and our pitching brings the hawsers terribly taut at times, sir. He looks to be all bows on some of the seas. Those lumping tanks take a deal to move 'em, but when once they *do* start off pitching and rolling, there's not an old boom-foresail Geordie that's in it with them, Mr. Hornby."

"What are you talking about?" shouted the colonel, suddenly awakened by the skipper's deep sea notes. "Anything wrong, hey?"

"O Lord, no, sir. Wrong! Gor bless me! just step on deck, colonel, and you'll find there's nothing more harmful happening than the *Silver Sea* teaching the cistern in our wake a few lovely steps in the *art o' dancing*," said Pipes, bestowing one of the squarest of his square smiles upon Miss Edwards and Mrs. Inglefield.

"No, thank you," said the colonel; "I'm not fond of wet and wind. Just keep the steamer from running into us, that's all;" and he frowned around him to see if the grog, regularly introduced by the steward at half-past nine, was anywhere about.

As Pipes left us to go on deck, Hornby followed him and exchanged a few words with him at the foot of the companion ladder, then returned and sat stroking his chin between his thumb and forefinger with a rather monkey-like expression of face, and a melancholy cock of his eyes at the skylight. There was so much noise in the cabin, such sounds of creaking and straining, the harsh grating of the rudder, the jarring shock of colliding waters under the counter, and the roaring of the wind which sounded not a little like thunder heard in a vault, that conversation became difficult and fatiguing. One had to "sing out," as sailors say, to be heard. The ship's bell was struck on deck, telling the hour to be half-past nine, and spirits and water and biscuits were placed, not on the table, but on the swinging trays where they could not capsize. It was now blowing very strong; one did not need to go on deck to find that out. The squalls, too, were more frequent, and the hard lashing of the skylight at times would last so long that I'd think it had settled fairly down into a heavy wet gale. I don't fancy any of us half enjoyed the furious dance we were being treated to. Hornby, I might suppose, had his thoughts on the steamer astern, as I had. He with the fear of losing her, and I for fear of her dangerously intimate association with us amid this Atlantic tumble; but the minds of the others were centred entirely in the capering of the *Silver Sea*. A sudden fierce upward rush of the stern would set Edwards grabbing his chair and glancing round with an air of dismay; or a heavy lee roll that swung the rim of the trays almost against the upper deck, and filled the cabin with the thunderous booming of a great sea washing past the quarter, would startle a cry out of Mrs. Inglefield.

I was about to cross over to Miss Edwards, with the idea of saying a few encouraging words to her, but waited till the ship had taken a heavy plunge that one could feel was going to happen by her manner of hanging fire for the space of a breath or two as she topped the long slant of a surge and trembled on the edge of its precipice.

"I say, Hornby!" bawled the colonel at 'his instant; "do you know, by George, this——" But what he meant to say was smothered clean out of all hearing by the shattering pitch of the vessel, followed by a deluge of water sheer over the forward weather bulwarks, that sounded for all the world as if a big house had fallen upon us in a deluge of bricks and tiles and beams and rafters. Simultaneously with this there was a shock that was not to be mistaken for a moment for any blow that the sea would administer. We all *sprang to our feet*, whilst Mr. Edwards shouted "The steamer had

s'ruck us!" and jumping for my cap, which I had put upon a chair, I danced up the companion ladder as fast as ever my legs would carry me, to see what was the matter, and to give what help I could, should extra help be wanted.

CHAPTER XXV.

WE ARE NEARLY LOST.

FOR a moment or two it was impossible to tell what had happened; it was not quite dark, but it took one some time to see, after the glare in the cabin. There was a squall blowing at the time, and the rain in it stung the face as though the discharge were hail instead of drops of water. The driving clouds obscured the sky, just as rolls of smoke might, but over our fore-royal yard where the moon was, there was a sort of blanching in the vapour as it fled; and aided by this and the broad spaces of foam, one's eyes could be made some use of. I heard Pipes roar out to the fellow at our wheel, "What are you doing with the ship, man! Starboard your helm—starboard your helm! hard a starboard with it." I ran aft and saw the huge steamer plunging within her own length of us; she was rolling and bowing heavily, the sea ran in liquid pitch to her sides and then broke into masses of foam, which, whilst she leaned to them or reared her giant bows, whitened along the whole length of her and threw out the massive black fabric plain to the sight. Only one hawser—the weather one—connected her with us; its inky stretch was to be seen whenever the head of a surge flashed melting under our counter; the other was gone, and I immediately understood that the sound which had startled us in the cabin was the shock and thud of its breaking.

What happened now was so sudden that I scarce recall it to this moment without finding my heart beating half as fast again as it should to the recollection. Standing right aft and looking at the steamer through the rushing squall, at one moment swept down till our taffrail seemed to be within a hand's reach of the roaring, bubbling black waters, then soaring out of the pallid boiling smother that our quarters and counter had churned up, I noticed that the huge vessel in our wake, under reefed trysails and stay foresail, was paying off under a helm evidently hard a starboard. The reason of this was plain: I was not a sailor, but my instincts were not the less sure. The fellow who was at our wheel, alarmed perhaps by the parting of the lee hawser, had put his helm down, thinking more of the craft behind him than of anything else, and eager to get out of his road; this it was that caused old Pipes to *roar out the order to put the wheel hard over; but the ship had*

come up quickly, her sails were shaking and the thunder of them distractingly added to the abominable sense of confusion inspired by the headlong pitching of the ship, the blows of seas striking her bows and tumbling in deluges over the rail, the shouting and screaming of the passing squall, and the scores of other noises, all indeterminable, but, for all that, swelling the hullabaloo raised by the infernal orchestra. The steamer's people seeing us apparently in the act of staying, and not knowing what we were about, not perhaps reflecting that though one hawser had parted we were still held to her by another, had jammed their helm hard over to avoid a collision. I saw what would happen, and yelled out, "She'll drag us right up into the wind : for God's sake let slip the weather hawser." I was to leeward : whether my voice reached Pipes's ears I cannot say : no attention was paid to my shout.

"Hard a-starboard ! hard a-starboard !" roared the skipper.

"Hard a-starboard it is, sir !" echoed the fellow at the wheel, grinding at the weather spokes, whilst Semple hung on to leeward, sweating the chains through the leading blocks till God knows where the tiller end pointed to.

"Why, don't you see——" I was yelling again.

"Let go the weather mizzen topsail braces ! Square away the after yards !" shouted Pipes. "By thunder ! you'll have her in irons ! The steamer'll be over us ! Shiver the sails, Mr. Semple, shiver the sails, sir ! Jump forward and get the inner jib hoisted ! Never mind if it blows away ! Quick, man ! why, by all that's——"

Snap, twang, thud ! went the second hawser, communicating to the ship the same peculiar hollow shock that had brought me spinning out of the cabin. Then it was that Pipes grasped the situation. The canting of the steamer's head to leeward under a starboard helm had been dragging us right up into the wind, despite our hard-over wheel. Wonderful it was that the old skipper hadn't noticed this, though to be sure it was all desperately sudden ; besides, he had a hundred things to think of, had possibly forgotten the second hawser, and might imagine the steamer to be still steering a straight course, and that her canting position was due to our helmsman, whose blunder in putting the helm of the *Silver Sea* down when the first tow-rope parted, Pipes's whole struggle was to remedy.

But the matter was very plain now ; the weather hawser had broken, but not before it had slewed us head to wind, with every stitched we showed aback ; and there were we, rolling and plunging dead in the eye of the heavy sea, with the enormous hull of the steamer looking like the loom of land close under our stern, and passing us so slowly that it seemed impossible she would go clear of us before we were into her.

"Keep all fast with the inner jib ! Raise foretack and sheet !"

shouted Pipes, making three leaps forward till he was abreast of the foremost quarter boat, and sending his voice along the decks sheer through the gale with a trumpet-note in it that was absolutely startling when one considered it was only human lungs that produced it. "We must box her round, men ! round with the foreyards before we're aboard the steamer !"

I shall never forget the scene at that minute. There they were, flat aback, head to sea, a gale of wind blowing, and close to us astern was the immense steamship wallowing in the trough and shearing down into the black hills with a savage butting of her straight stem that crushed the water into boiling milk for half an acre round her. The clouds blew in masses along the sky with a troubled dingy sheen where the moon hung, though that would pass at times, and with now and again a sharp brief outfly of rain that splashed into one's face from fair over the bows coming horizontally like a flight of arrows upon the wings of the wind ; straight ahead where the ship's bowsprit pointed, you saw the swelling inky billows rushing into foam as they raced with light enough flowing off their hurling snow to reveal the wild stretches of froth lacing the headlong slants of the midnight hollows. There was just the kind of dimness in the air, too, to give terror to the picture ; everything was indistinct, and it was the shadowiness not less than the perilous situation of the ship, that put a thrilling element of fear into that time. Oh, it was just a phantasm of angry ocean and plunging ships, with the realities of human strife in it ; you would have felt this to hear the loud shouts of our captain, mates, and men, and marked the jumping of their dark forms as they sped from rope to rope and hauled and pulled like madmen, and then have looked at the visionary outline of our ship upon the hills of water running at her, wildly plunging her head into a storm of white that blew aft in glimmering masses over the bows, shining with phosphoric light as they flashed past the masts, and whirling with a shriek of wind into the sea beyond the taffrail ; then presently driving up with a leap of her bows that sloped her masts over the stern and buried her quarters, till you'd notice the eyes of the helmsman gleaming in the binnacle haze, glancing from right to left, as if trying to make out which side the sea meant to choose for its quarter-deck spring.

"Square away the after yards ! Round in the braces for your lives !"

One saw the whole wild scene, the surges rolling down ahead, the looming steamship close astern, in a breath ; but the main braces led right aft, there was a rush of men to them, and I scuttled to the companion to get out of their road. Here I found Edwards and the colonel, and Hornby and the ladies, all clustered together in the hatchway ; some half out of it, some below on the steps. *It was impossible to talk, the peril we were in silenced us.*

besides, nothing short of a speaking-trumpet would have carried the voice above the roaring amongst the masts, the yells of the seamen, and the shouts of Pipes and his mates.

"Round with them, men ! round with them !"

"Tail on to the mizzen topsail braces, some hands. Smartly, for your lives, lads !"

"Wheel there ! hard a-starboard ! till she feels it !"

Our ship now had sternway, and this with the send of the sea was bringing that enormous lump of a steamer astern closer and closer to us. Impossible to talk, did I say just now ; faith, it was almost impossible to *breathe*. Why, within pistol shot of our taff-rail was the four thousand ton steamer, heaving her leviathan form under trysails, and paying off with horrible slowness. The wash of the seas against her sides was like the sound of surf in a gale of wind upon an iron-bound coast. Her illuminated scuttles stood out upon the blackness she made like unwinking eyes fixed upon us. You heard voices shouting to us from her, but their meaning was torn to pieces by the wind ere the words had fairly left the lips which delivered them. There fell a gleam from the struggling moon and lighted up the great shape, and you could have said that a jump would have carried you right on to her deck ; but the light was swept past her, and the beam like a silver spear was buried and lost in a black hill of water beyond, and as the darkness rolled on to her again, she loomed up to twice her size, and as we sank into the trough, and she swung with a leaning heave up, it made one clasp one's hands to see how horribly big and near she was.

At last, with yards braced up on the port tack and foresail down, the *Silver Sea* took the whole weight of the wind off her port bow into her canvas, and heeled without an inch of way upon her upon the side of a surge that brought the decks very nearly up and down. There was as much suspense in that minute of time as would suffice to furnish out twenty fine-weather voyages. A long yearning shudder seemed to go right through the noble little vessel as she swept with a steady gushing plunge into the hollow ; the next instant Pipes was grasping the lee wheel, and the ship with every stitch full was flinging the seas wildly off her weather bow. The whole of the crew—at least the mob looked big enough for all hands—stood just forward of the mizzen mast, waiting—I knew what for. It was enough to bring the heart into a man's throat till it came near to choking, to think of the rush threatened by those men—the spring for the steamer's sides—should we foul her. There'd be no more chance for our ship, in such a sea as was running, against that mass of metal to leeward of her, than were the surges to set her grinding her bones away against the base of a cliff. The drift given her by the gale and the impulse of the seas combined, would do her business for her out of

hand, if the way she gathered were not faster than her broadside motion.

But the *Silver Sea* was a clipper; she had the lines of a racing yacht; those high waves she took as though they were hurdles, and she let their dark volumes roll under her and crush into snow against the steamer. Another giddy plunge that filled the lee scuppers, floated us with screaming rigging right on to the huge screw's quarter; then followed the recoil of the billow on whose summit the steamship leaned; and the next surge that swept us up found us a stone's throw past her quarter, and as safe as though the whole Atlantic Ocean rolled between us.

The peril we had gone in was too horribly plain to be missed by any one of us. We stood speechless whilst the huge steamer drew up into the darkness astern, and became little more than a deeper shadow upon that part of the ocean, and whilst the *Silver Sea* with the gale abaft the port beam rolled and plunged, foaming with a sort of rejoicing swiftness over the coiling surges, as though like a sentient thing she was half crazy with delight over her recovered liberty.

"Stand by to heave the ship to!" rattled out the hoarse notes of old Pipes. "Haul the foresail up ready for stowing."

"Look alive, hearties!" echoed the voice of the chief mate. "Back the topsail yards before we run the steamer out of sight."

"I say, Hornby," roared the colonel in the companion, shoving his way up among the others by a few steps, "what's the meaning of Pipes stopping the ship again, eh? Haven't we had *enough* of the steamer damn it!"

"Why, yes, till the weather moderates; but we must stand by her, you know. Can't leave hundreds of our fellow-creatures out there to perish, colonel," answered Hornby.

"Oh, confound your humanity!" shouted the colonel. "Perish! hang them, aren't they safer in that mountain of a ship than we are? I'll have no more towing—no, by heavens! Edwards, I appeal to you as my host. Edwards, man, we must have no more towing. Why, does your little friend know, does Hornby here know that we've only escaped with our lives by a hair's breadth, that if it hadn't been for our luck, for as to seamanship the deuce an atom of it have we seen, by George! we should all be at the bottom of the ocean by this time? At the bottom of the ocean, Hornby, d'ye hear me?" And with a plunge he shot himself on to the deck and thrust his hairy countenance close into the shipowner's face to see him.

At that moment the steamer fired a rocket. The wild signal cut through the gale and burst with a dull flash that threw a quiver of light upon the clouds like a play of dim sheet lightning.

"Pipes!" screamed Hornby, "don't that mean that they're begging us not to leave 'em?"

The old skipper did not hear the question, and small wonder, considering that by our helm having been put down, we had the gale whistling and roaring over the bow again with all the old distracting noise of bursting seas and groaning timbers, to which the crew were adding with their hoarse yawling as they snugged the flapping foresail and ran to the topsail braces and sheets.

"I say, Hornby, we must have no more towing," shouted Edwards. "Sorry to get in the road of a lucrative salvage job, but life's life, man."

"But aren't we to take pity upon all those fellow-beings out there? Are we to leave them to drift on to the coast of Africa and whiten those sands with their bones, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?" cried Hornby, shrill with excitement and temper.

"Look here!" I shouted, for let me tell you we all *had* to shout to be heard. "The ship's safe now. Let Pipes heave her to. When he's done let him join us below, and in the shelter of the cabin we can discuss the matter calmly."

"But how d'ye know she's safe?" roared the colonel. "Who the deuce is going to prove it? Why, here's that Pipes now sticking the ship up for the steamer again, and we know that she's under sail and steering in pursuit of us, and if we're not sent to the bottom before this night's out, it'll not be because Hornby isn't thirsting for our lives."

"Come, come," cried Mr. Edwards; "let us go below as Aubyn says, and talk the thing over there. This wind blows my breath away. Hallo! there goes another rocket. What the plague! are they celebrating our escape with fireworks?"

"No, no," vociferated Hornby, with his hands to his mouth to carry his voice; "they're imploring us to stand by 'em! They're signalling to let us know where they are."

"Don't believe it!" bellowed the colonel. "Stand by 'em! Why, aren't they safer than we are? Better that they should stand by *us*, hang them, if it wasn't that they're so deuced big and clumsy and dangerous. You're thinking of money, and I'm thinking of our lives: and I mean, by Jupiter, that we shall *keep* our lives—so there!" he cried with his mouth at Hornby's ear, and venting his resolution in a voice that must pretty nearly have stunned the little man.

My proposal that we should go below was helped at this moment by a heavy squall of rain, that so blackened the night with its haze, it was difficult to see the length of the ship. All who were outside scrambled into the companion, and presently we were seated under the wildly swinging lamps, which were cheerful enough after the *dark wet decks*, most of us with blanched faces, for our scare had *been a heavy one* and our situation so perilous that it made a kind

of wonder to find the *Silver Sea* afloat and ourselves dry and snug inside her. The steward was despatched to tell Captain Pipes to come to the cabin as soon as he could leave the deck, and meanwhile we argued our position.

"I have a great respect for you, Hornby," cried the colonel, balancing a tumbler of cold brandy grog in his hand, "and no one could be more obliged to you for the use of this ship than I am. But see here, my friend, hang me if I am going to let you make money out of me by my death. Understand that I'm not here to be drowned, neither is Mrs. Inglefield nor my daughter."

"I say, Edwards," bawled the little shipowner, "our friend's language is very objectionable. Aren't our lives as precious to us as his——"

"Yes, yes, I know what the colonel means," exclaimed Edwards. "But for all that it was touch and go—the least bit nearer and we should have been crushed into staves. We must have no more towing, Hornby. All very well in fine weather and daylight, but in a tempest on a dark night—no, no! let us hear no more of towing."

The echo of a smart bang on deck capped our friend's words, and Mrs. Inglefield shrieked out, "What is it now, Charlie? Are we sinking?"

"It'll only be a rocket, I think, discharged in reply to the steamer's signal, to let her know our whereabouts," said I.

"Yes, and to bring her steering for us in the dark and running over us!" cried the colonel, wiping his forehead. "Pipes'll do for us yet. All of you mark what I say: he'll do for us yet," and he emptied his glass of grog down his throat and put the tumbler on a swinging tray.

"I don't want to force my wishes upon you, but I certainly think in the name of humanity, and all that sort of thing, that we ought to stand by those distressed people," exclaimed Hornby, smiting his little leg with his little fist.

"But aren't they perfectly safe in that great steamer?" demanded Miss Edwards, whose uneasiness filled her eyes with a brightness almost febrile.

"Of course they are," said I. "What harm can befall her?" I continued, addressing Hornby: "She's under command, she's only a few days out, and ought therefore to be well stocked with provisions, and it'll be mighty strange if she doesn't soon fall in with a steamer willing to take her tow-rope, and better able to help her than a sailing ship."

"Of course, of course," shouted the colonel. "Everybody can see that but Hornby, who don't choose to see it. And why? Because, confound it, the wish to make a few hundred pounds triumphs over every consideration he should feel for the safety of his friends."

I should have thought that this would have set little Hornby hopping about in a passion, and shouting for Pipes that he might tell him to shift his helm afresh and instantly for the Cape of Good Hope. But the little creature was a real shipowner at heart. The wishes of his friends were unmistakable, and the language of the colonel, that was not a little insulting in its way, made those wishes in a high degree emphatic; yet the desire to earn the round sum that would certainly follow his towage of the *Empress* to Madeira was too much for him; he could not resist the temptation. The port to be reached was not far off; we were in no hurry; the insurance on the ship (I presume she was insured) could not be vitiated by a "deviation," as the underwriting term is, made in the interests of humanity; and the sample the *Silver Sea* had given us of her towing capacity was, so far as it had gone, very good. One saw him scratching his nose and looking down, whilst the colonel roared and Mr. Edwards expostulated, but it was clear he meant to hold out if he could and have his way; and though the colonel greeted all his references to humanity and the duty of succouring fellow-beings in distress with a great deal of savage and scornful laughter, yet the little man went on, pointing out what all right-minded men would expect of us with an almost unnatural tranquillity, and as though he would get us in the end to believe that nothing but a pure and beautiful compassion influenced him.

In about twenty minutes or so Pipes arrived. He left his streaming fur cap on the companion ladder and approached us, balancing himself very nimbly on his bow legs, and smiling with great determination.

"Sorry I couldn't come before, ladies and gentlemen," said he, "but the ship's snug enough now, and making lovely weather of it."

"Where's the steamer?" demanded Edwards.

"A good bit to wind'ard, sir; nothing to be seen of her, for it's drawn up very mucky, very mucky indeed."

"Yes, so mucky, as you call it," cried the colonel, "that in groping about to find us she'll run into and sink us. At any moment," he roared, raising his hand as a sea swept us by with a dull echo of its thunder penetrating to the cabin, "we may feel her stem strike us, see these timbers here yawn, and behold the water pouring in in tons!"

"Goodness gracious, Charlie!" cries Mrs. Inglefield.

"Lord bless your heart, colonel, d'ye think there's no look-out kept on deck, that you talk like that?" said Pipes, bringing his eyes from Hornby's face, that wore a very telegraphic look, to the military man, and putting on an air of amused astonishment. "Ladies, don't let this here language alarm you, I beg. Mr. Aubyn *here, anyway, knows that there's no danger.*"

I held my peace.

"My contention, Pipes," exclaimed Hornby in a shrill voice, "is that it's our duty to stand by that steamer."

"Undoubtedly," replied Pipes, with excessive acquiescence.

"She's knows our name," continued the little man, still very shrill; "she's knows that I'm on board, that Moses Pipes is master, and Allan Bird chief mate; and if we leave her she'll report our inhumanity, and I shall be denounced right and left in the shipping papers for cruelty, and all that sort of thing, don't you know."

"Not to mention the certain chance of my losing my certificate and being held up as a disgrace to the mercantile marine of Great Britain," cried Pipes, more vehemently acquiescent still. "As to Mr. Bird, it ud simply be his ruination, and he's got a wife and family to provide for."

"Yes, and we've got our lives to think of," snarled the colonel. "There must be no more towing, damme; or, if you *will* have your way, Hornby, put me and my wife and daughter into the steamboat first, d'ye hear, for I mean to run no more risks in this splashing wooden vessel."

"We're not towing now, anyways," said Pipes, who had his cue, poor fellow, and who no more dared to oppose the manifest wishes of his "owner" than a city clerk with nothing to support himself and his family on but his salary, and without a prospect in the world if he lost his situation, would dare resist the orders of his employer. "We're hove to, and are as safe as a church in the middle of a town. We shall send up an occasional rocket to comfort the hearts of the poor unfortunates out there, who all night long'll be staring and staring into the blackness on the look-out for our signals. I expect the weather'll moderate by the morning; and when it comes on daybreak we'll pick the steamer up again; and if this is objected to, all I can say is, it'll be as severe a blow to my professional character as was ever aimed at it."

He turned his honest square face upon us one after another. It would have been an easy thing to challenge his sincerity, but you could not look at him, think of his years, reflect that by his dis-obliging Hornby he might find himself stranded on his return, without the chance of obtaining further employment, and quarrel with him for abetting the little fellow's wishes. I know it was these considerations which kept me silent. Perhaps he felt that of all the people there I could have spoken most to the point, for when his eyes met mine there was a touch of wistfulness in them, a sort of entreaty. "There's no danger, there's no danger," he said, looking at me; "it's our duty to stand by the steamer."

The colonel for some time continued to make a great fuss over *this resolution*, and his wife found several objections to urge against

it ; but Edwards, seeing Hornby determined, and perhaps finding a delicacy in demanding that the little fellow should not employ and do what he chose with his own ship, had nothing more to say. As for me, my chief annoyance was that we should lose the strong and favourable wind that was blowing. There was not so much of it but that we could have carried it on our quarter with a topgallant sail over a double-reefed topsail, and it would have done wonders for our latitude, to say nothing of the buoyant and rhythmical swinging it would have yielded instead of the straining, tearing, foaming, and shrieking behaviour of the ship under a shred of canvas, and leaping and diving under a lee helm upon the seas rolling in tall black ridges at her bows.

Pipes drank off a glass of grog and went on deck. I rose to follow him, just to take a last look round before turning in ; but whilst I lingered a moment at the foot of the steps, looking up at the howling blackness that lay in an ebony square on top of the hatch, as though the companion were closed with doors of jet, Miss Edwards joined me, and stood balancing herself with her hand on the brass handrail.

"What sort of night is it ?" she asked.

"Most uninviting," I replied. "The deck will not be fit for you, Miss Edwards. The moon's smothered up, and you'll not see a third of the ship's length."

"Oh, I have no intention of going on deck. We are not in danger, I hope, in lying as we are ?"

"Not in the least."

"I mean there is no chance of the steamer running into us, as Colonel Inglesfield suggested ?"

"Oh dear no ; there'll be too bright a look-out kept aboard both vessels to make such a risk as that likely," said I heartily, for there was an anxiety in her fine eyes that caused one to feel the need of encouraging her.

"How dogged Mr. Hornby is," she exclaimed. "He sees our wishes plainly, and yet he insists upon keeping near that dangerous steamer."

"He has the instincts of the British shipowner," said I. "You observe he is slightly poetical when there is nothing to earn, but the instant money comes in his way he grows hideously prosaic."

She glanced towards the group at the end of the cabin, and then said, "We were in great danger when the ropes which connected us with the steamer broke, weren't we, Mr. Aubyn ?"

"Why," I replied, "now that it's all over and not likely to happen again, I may say yes, we were in great danger indeed, as near being dismasted, stove in, sunk and drowned, as it is possible to imagine. Nothing but Pipes's seamanship saved us. Had he lost his head *or been less prompt* in swinging the yards round, we should *have gone to pieces* against that rolling steamer in five minutes.

But a miss is as good as a mile, you know, especially at sea, where there's a very great deal of close shaving, and there's no danger *now*, anyway—you may go to bed and sleep peacefully, quite assured of *that*."

"Well, it may be as you say. I don't feel much in the humour for bed, though. How much safer the land is than the sea, after all, in spite of those sailor songs in which seamen, you remember, in a hurricane are made to say they are so very thankful that they are not where chimney-pots and roofs are flying."

She laughed, with a kind of shiver running through her rich voice, and then wishing me good-night, cautiously worked her way aft again, holding on to the edge of the table for support. It was an evil thought to come into my brain at such a time, but her beauty made me almost wish that something serious *would* happen, just to give me a chance of converting myself into a hero in her eyes. One could not look at her without longing to rank high in her esteem, not to speak of anything else; though let me tell you that her following me to the companion ladder, and talking to me there and making me a confidant, as it were, in her misgivings and ideas, formed just the sort of behaviour to despatch me on to the deck in a mood that should have proved a fruitful one in sentiment, if a fine calm night had been on and a gentle moon to help to such fructification, instead of a black fierce wind full of spray, and squalls of wet, which would sometimes come heavy enough to drive romance out of one like so much cobweb.

A gloomy, howling night it was, and I don't know what carried me into it, unless it were the old professional trick of taking one squint at the sky and two over the side before going to bed. The wind was damp with spray; but the last squall had blown over, and there was no more rain just then. One would have expected some sort of dim twilight-like illumination from the moon behind the clouds; but the vapour lay so thick—dense flying masses with a whirl of scud beneath them, as any one might suppose—that it was impenetrable to the mild lustre of the luminary, as yet but in her second quarter, and the shadows of the night lay dark indeed upon the deep; still, foul as the weather looked, the gale was not so hard but that it would have let us run. Any sailor stepping on deck would have known we were not hove to for the wind and the sea, there was not enough of either, savagely as the ship jumped, and sharply as she'd slope her decks to it now and again; but he might have stared to windward and to leeward with a hundred eyes, and found no other cause. There was nothing to be seen save the curling head of a surge glimmering out of the darkness, or a faint flashing of phosphorescent light over the bow when a plunge of the ship's head drove an oncoming billow back into boiling water, whose seething rose shrill amid the whistling and dreary clattering of rope *against rope aloft*.

I had not been looking about me for two minutes when a dark figure on the weather quarter let fly a rocket from a socket fixed for that purpose in the rail there. It flew aloft with the report of a gun, soaring to a prodigious height, and cleaving the wind almost plump with the point from which it had been fired, and then burst into a gush of yellow splendour that flashed up the night like as you may see the clouds thrown out by a winking of summer lightning over the sea-line, and the light blew away in a ball of fire. I knew the steamer would be to windward, and I gazed into the thick dusk that way for some time, expecting to see a similar signal; and then some one passing the companion near which I was standing, I said, "Is that you, Captain Pipes?"

"No, it's Mr. Bird; Captain Pipes is right aft there."

"What's become of the steamer, Mr. Bird?"

"Oh, she'll be out to wind'ard there, I expect, Mr. Aubyn," he replied.

"Has she answered your signals?"

"Up to the last two times she has. Why she's stopped I don't know, unless she reckons that our firing's enough for both."

"That's not quite shipshape, is it? Won't she guess that if we fail to see her signals we shall conclude that she is out of sight, and give up wasting our rockets?"

"Why, if she's in sight, and finds that we have done firing, she may turn to then and fire herself. It's Mr. Hornby's wish that we should send up these lights every half hour. He don't mean to lose sight of her, if he can help it; and he's right, for if he can carry her to Madeira, there'll be a deal of money for him to take up."

We stood awhile talking after this fashion, and then Pipes called him. Six bells were struck, signifying eleven o'clock. The notes rang with a moan through the crying wind, and put a shudder into me somehow by the wilder and darker melancholy they seemed to give to the weltering, fitfully glimmering shadow beyond the ship. It might have been the memory of the narrow escape we had had, coupled with the shivering thoughts it begot when I looked over the lee rail, and made out the phantom forms of billows rolling in shapeless ink-black processions into the deeper gloom, that depressed me with a foreboding spirit. It lay heavy, and I could not shake it off. You heard the voice of the gale aloft, but could see nothing, unless it might be the faintest glimpse of the lower maintopsail waving like a square of pitch upon the black ground of the sky. Now and again a vision of the hull of the ship would lift out of the white water around her bows and sides, and float upwards, borne by an invisible fold of sea, and then vanish as the swoop of the fabric carried it into one of the hollows which roared between the swinging liquid peaks. Dreary as it all was, the *humour it begot in me* caused me to find a dismal fascination in it,

and I should have stood looking on at this glooming universe full of interminable motion, and the dim gleam of froth, and the innumerable crying of the gale, but for a sudden smart squall that swept down in a whole sheet of water, and drove me with headlong hurry below.

The cabin lamps were dimmed, and everybody had gone to bed. It was a wise example, and in twenty minutes I was between the blankets sound asleep.

It was hard upon nine o'clock when I woke, having overslept the steward's regular eight o'clock summons. Every now and again the scuttle of my cabin would be swept by a gurgling wash of bright green water, which, as it filled, left a weeping sparkle of sunshine upon the wet glass. It was certain that there was a grand sailing breeze blowing, and that the *Silver Sea* was rushing through the water like a steamer. This the veriest landsman could have told without going to look. If we had anything in tow, I was pretty sure it was not a broken-down screw-ship of 4000 tons burden. Every buoyant, floating leap of the vessel was full of liberty, and if she was not doing a long ten knots by the log, then assuredly the water that welled up over the scuttle yearning and flying, and like liquid emerald for the gem-like lustre in its transparency, was not green but black. I was all excitement for news, and made haste to bundle out of my cabin.

"How long before breakfast is ready, steward?"

"Ten minutes, sir."

"Anybody up?"

"Everybody, sir, and all on deck."

I put my nose above the companion and looked aloft. A noble wind, blowing one point abaft the beam, was flashing fair and full into every cloth the *Silver Sea* could extend. Topgallant, topmast, and lower stunsails were out, and the swinging boom with the great gleaming square of canvas pulling at it was forked up by the heel of the ship to an angle of thirty. Under this vast spread—everything doing its work, staysail and jib-sheets like fiddle-strings, halliards vibrating with their tension to the wind, guys and braces and weather standing rigging ruling the blue and white of the sky like bars of steel—the *Silver Sea* was racing along the ocean as an albatross flies, scarcely accentuating the heights and hollows of the billows by the aerial adaptation of her clipper hull to them, and arching a rainbow at her bows through which she seemed to sail, as though old Daddy Neptune was honouring by this crystalline erection of exquisite tints her progress into the deeper solitude of his dominions. We were alone: there was no steamer in our wake, no sail in sight, nothing around but the wide and foaming blue sea sweeping to right and left in a girdle under the sun; where, like a diamond-clasp, the bright white light of the young luminary's reflection seemed to unite the two ends of the blue

cincture. Everybody was on deck, as the steward had said, whetting his appetite for breakfast against the fresh and pouring wind.

"Good morning, ladies and gentleman," I sang out. "How now, pray? Where away in this fashion? Are we still outward bound, for I am too much surprised as yet to notice on which side of us the sun stands?"

"Why, what are you surprised at, Aubyn?" exclaimed Edwards, as I joined him and the others, for they were all in a group near the mizzen rigging, looking seawards.

"First of all, by the mysterious disappearance of the night, the foul and drenching old hag I left in charge of the ocean here at six bells yesterday."

"Isn't this better?" shouted the colonel, grinning, and evidently in high spirits.

"Certainly; but where's the steamer?" said I to Hornby.

"Blown out of sight," exclaimed the little fellow, looking ruefully at me.

"No, no!" cried Edwards, laughing heartily, "you must have the truth, Aubyn. You're just as much entitled to your revenge as we are. I say, captain!" he called to the old fellow, who was stumping the deck athwartships this side the binnacle; "just tell Mr. Aubyn what's become of the steamer, will you?"

Pipes approached us, rubbing his nose and grinning with an air of perplexity. "Why, gentlemen and ladies," said he, with a sidelong squint at Hornby, "I really don't know that there's anything in this job to merit repeating—you have the facts."

"Aubyn, it is too fine though, confound it, it's *too* fine though," exclaimed the colonel, still grinning with all his might, and so contorting his countenance that his whiskers stood straight out in distinct bristles like the fibres in the glory round the head of a saint. "Think of your friend the captain here shoving the ship up all night into the wind and burning several pounds worth of rockets, only to see the steamer, when the dawn broke, with another steamer alongside of her! Isn't that something like a joke now, by George?"

"It's true enough," exclaimed Pipes, with a doleful shake of the head.

"Ay, but that's not all," said Edwards; "just tell Aubyn, captain, that in reply to your flags she signalled that she didn't want any further help from us. Why, Hornby, that was the snub direct, you know. Nothing could well be more offensive. After nearly sinking us, and allowing us to fire rockets all night, and lose time to the extent of twelve or fourteen hours, to coolly wave us off, to contemptuously say, 'Thanks; we've had quite enough of *you*, you can clear out.'"

"*Hang me if it isn't actionable, Hornby. Confound me if I wouldn't sue 'em!*" shouted the colonel.

"Oh, let them go," muttered the little fellow; "we acted in the interests of humanity and all that sort of thing, don't you know. I'm glad matters have turned out as they have. It grieved me much to find myself opposed to your wishes last night, especially since I fear Miss Edwards was on her papa's side; but humanity must stand even before chivalry. Yes, we must discharge our duty, even though by so doing we vex and offend those whose good opinions we dearly prize," and he gave Miss Edwards a pointed bow as he spoke.

I was thankful the colonel supplied me with an excuse to laugh out. "Why, Hornby," he roared, "you're worse than Joseph Surface, man. You beat him hollow in sentiment. My dear little friend, don't talk to us about humanity. Why, by jingo, all you thought of was the money you'd get by towing the steamer."

This was like drawing the peg out of a full cask. After this, "chaff" poured fast and thick upon the little man. None of us spared him; even the ladies joined in; until the shipowner, blazing up, shrieked out, "I'll never act with humanity again, never! I'll never again subject myself to such misconstruction. Were we to sight a vessel sinking with two thousand people aboard, I wouldn't make an effort to save them. Edwards, you hear me; I'm a man of my word and all that sort of thing, don't you know, and if I were to see the ocean covered with mothers and their infants, I'd sail right through them, I would. It's fearful to be misjudged."

The breakfast bell put an end to this for a time, though we all let fly at him afresh when at table, being determined to punish him for his disobliging conduct on the previous night. It was not very kind treatment, perhaps, to give a man who had placed his ship at our service, but we were not going to allow any cant about humanity to mask his rapacity from us, nor were we willing to easily forgive him for prolonging the uneasiness and anxiety that had been excited by the serious risk we had run.

Anyhow, the steamer troubled us no more; though you would have imagined from the manner in which our noble little ship swept through the deep, that she believed the lumping metal craft to be in full chase of her, and that there must be no halting in the swift flight until she had put some hundreds of leagues of blue Atlantic water between her and the monster that had nearly sunk her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WE TAKE THE TRADES AND ENTER THE DOLDRUMS.

ALL these incidents of the steamer, the derelicts, the gull and the *like* formed our voyage. They seem to lead to nothing; but in

reality they bring us slowly, but faithfully and consistently, as events in nature always do, to the one circumstance of this journey that induced me to sit down and relate it in writing. The ocean is a marvellous plain ; we all know that the wonders of the Lord are most visible in it ; yet though the mariner in the course of a long life may have encountered many astonishing things, it is rarely that a number of them come together in a single voyage ; and hence, so far in these pages, I have offered you no more than the picture of the uneventful part of our passage to the Cape of Good Hope, asking you to join us rather in our pleasure journey than to participate in the extraordinary calamities which subsequently befell us.

But now the fabric of this yarn must be woven from stuff of another texture. Yet let me proceed steadily, just as the ship sails and the ocean surges roll.

We drove through the parallels of the Horse Latitudes with a pleasant wind. It was evening when our coppered forefoot smote a little stretch of Gulf Stream weed, and Miss Edwards and Miss Inglefield and I stood for half an hour at the taffrail whilst the gloom of the evening came down, watching the crushed marine growth whirling up in fire again in our wake, though as the moonlight gathered power the dark masses of stuff, flattening the water and intercepting the wind, gave the ocean a sombre, dusky tint, which was heightened to the senses by the sudden noiseless passage of the ship as she slipped into the mile or two of floating vegetation ; yet here and there the duskiness was relieved by patches of weed which in the moonlight shone white as drifts of snow upon a moor, and everywhere the phosphorus winked in fire among stalks and leaves till you would have thought this wondrous interlacing drifting growth, bearing with it the tropic airs of Florida, concealed another firmament, and that the multitudinous lights you saw were stars shining in a concavity beneath the dome you were sailing under.

It was hereabouts that two singular things happened. I remember them well, thanks to the keen impressions produced by even trifles at sea.

It was a very hot afternoon ; the ship was under all plain sail making good way, but the breeze had an African taste in it, a flavour of leagues of burning sand, though the Mogador coast lay a full thousand miles to the eastwards of us. Edwards, Hornby, and the colonel slept or nodded over cigars and books under the awning ; Miss Inglefield sketched, her mother yawned over some fancy work, and Miss Edwards in the cabin was playing very softly on the piano. I stepped below for some tobacco, and paused, more from habit than curiosity, to look at the barometer that hung in the *saloon*. At what hour it had been indexed I did not know ; but *the fall under the mark* was half an inch. Having profound faith

in the indications of this instrument, I stood viewing it with a feeling of dismay, for such a fall could betoken, I thought, nothing short of a hurricane. Besides, we were in the right latitudes for sudden and terrible storms, still well to the north of the verge of the Trades, and amid a part of the ocean that was pre-eminently the playground of the devastating cyclone.

Miss Edwards stopped playing to ask me why I looked at the barometer so anxiously. It would not do to frighten her, so I answered that I was not looking at it anxiously; I was merely trying to conjecture the character of the change of weather we were likely to get from the drop I noticed in the mercury. My air of indifference deceived her; she went on deciphering with her fingers the piece of music that stood open before her, with a little gathering of her brows, as she bent her flashing eyes upon the page, that gave such a witchery to her singular beauty, I could have lingered watching her the whole afternoon. However, I was too anxious for such an indulgence as that, though it need not have been hard to contrive, perhaps, since it would have been easy to post myself alongside her, and take an interest in the music; and procuring what I wanted, I returned on deck and went straight up to Mr. Bird, whose watch it was.

"Have you noticed the glass?" said I.

"No," he replied; "what of it?"

"I find a fall of half an inch," said I.

"Half an inch!" he exclaimed, with a quick look aloft and around him; and without another word he bundled below. He returned in a few moments. "It's perfectly true," said he. "Half an inch and a trifle more since noon! I suppose the captain'll have remarked it."

"Has he a glass in his cabin?"

"Yes, a very fine aneroid. He believes more in those instruments than in mercury; but I don't. Half an inch!" he exclaimed with a glance at the companion-hatch; "the captain's awake, I know; yet I must report this to him if he's not soon on deck."

He walked about impatiently for a bit, directing many glances at all parts of the horizon, as indeed I did, for a heavy change of weather ran in my head, and already I fancied I could detect an alteration in the blue of the sky, a sort of filminess in it; and he then went below, I following at his heels to take another peep at the glass. Sure enough the fall was in excess of half an inch, and the mercury was clearly sinking with alarming rapidity.

"Well," cried Mr. Bird, with a face full of consternation, "I never saw the like of such a drop in the same space of time, no, not even in the Bay of Bengal;" and so saying, he marched straight up to Pipes' door, knocked, and entered.

Miss Edwards was still at the piano. "What is the matter

with the barometer?" she asked, approaching me to inspect the instrument. "I have never seen you take so much interest in it before."

"I have merely called Mr. Bird's attention to the sudden sinking of the mercury, and he has gone to report the circumstance to the captain."

"Sinking! Then we are to have a storm?"

"It looks like it," I replied; for when it came to a direct question from her, one had to answer it.

Pipes' door was flung open, and out he rolled with the mate at his heels. He stared at the barometer, breathing hard, and his square face seemed to grow flat with amazement as, with rounded eyes, he cried out, "Gor' bless my heart and soul! why, what a sing'ler thing now! My aneroid's risen since noon—actually risen!"

"There's no mistake about this fall, sir," exclaimed Mr. Bird.

"And what's more, it is steadily going on."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Pipes, "I see that, sir. But what are we to make of it? My aneroid can't be out."

"You'll find it is, though," said I. "Something wrong with its inside. There can be no deception about mercury. There it stands in the glass tube, and you may almost *see* it sinking."

The old skipper ran for his cap and hurried on deck with the mate. Soon afterwards I followed with Miss Edwards. I found Hornby and Edwards and the colonel wide awake listening to Pipes, who was expressing his amazement at the indication of the saloon barometer, and endeavouring by many a long stare round at the sea to fit it to the weather, or rather to what the weather suggested. Presently he sent the mate below to have another look, and the report was that the mercury had sunk by so much more—I forget what it was. On the other hand, the aneroid remained steady.

"There's no doubt your instrument has gone wrong, Pipes," exclaimed Hornby. "Mercury never deceives, you know."

"What's been the fall?" shouted the colonel.

"Getting on for an inch, sir," replied Mr. Bird.

"Since when?"

"Since noon."

"Then for God's sake," he roared, "shorten sail before you're dismasted. We were once very nearly upset off Réunion by the captain neglecting his barometer that clearly announced a cyclone."

Pipes said nothing, but stumped about here and there, determinedly inspecting the weather, and then in a sort of furtive way went below, but was on deck again in a trice, this time with a pale face.

"All hands shorten sail, Mr. Bird!" he bawled. "There can be no mistake about it; something's going to happen. Why, *smother me*, if the mercury isn't at 28.10 already."

crew were evidently astonished by the summons; but at last between the fine, clear afternoon and the stormy and changing orders sung out was like a spur to them, and they went about, hauling down and clewing up, whilst we who had to do discovered a dozen signs in as many directions all round of the approach of a fearful storm. Well, the ship was let down to topsails and foresail, the mainsail being rolled up, fore and aft canvas stowed excepting the fore-topmast stay—the mercury sank until it disappeared in the tube, yet the sky remained bright and the breeze steady."

At Mr. Bird, who had stepped into the cabin for I know not how many times to inspect the glass, reappeared with a singular look on his face, and said something to the captain. They went below, and shortly afterwards the steward walked forward and called the carpenter aft. Mr. Edwards was in the act of entering when the tempest meant to burst,—“But it must rise interrupted Hornby, when Pipes and Mr. Bird arrived looking sheepish.

“Hands make sail again on the ship!” shouted the mate, and Pipes coming up to us said, “Gentlemen and ladies, the weather’s made a fool of us. The mercury sank not because of either’s coming on, but because there’s a hole in the bag that it leak away!”

The incident that belongs to this time was this. It was a bright, bright morning; a soft wind blowing right astern barely felt along. As the ship floated gently over the light swell it would fall in against the masts with a tender flapping, and stood out again with a flash of the white of their curved bosoms uttering of reef-points and buntlines upon them, that to a sear might have passed for the murmur of fallen leaves stirred by the breeze in some shady place. There were a few clouds in the dark blue sky, and they swam over our mastheads as slowly as the ship sailed. Low down on our starboard was the silver speck of a ship’s canvas, apparently the top-sails and royals of a large vessel, though on looking at the point through a glass one found it a complete mirage, and one saw that the tiny squares hung disconnected above the reef-line that quivered like ruffled liquid glass, and the sails looked like kites flown in the tremulous blue air. Sleepily regarding this object, I was letting my thoughts drowsily flow to and fro on ship, speculating with half-closed eyes upon her nation—whether she was homeward bound, and so forth; and with a languid awe in my slumberous brain of the enormity of the sea—that needed but a mere handful of miles to sink clean beneath a great ship with a numerous company of souls on board and in her hold a cargo of value sufficient to construct a house for a man to live in ashore—a house big enough to bring

crowds to look at it and wonder. I say, I was gazing at the distant speck shining in the sun, and noddingly wondering how far distant the mightiest potentate in the world would need to row away from our ship in one of our boats, for one to confound him with the dorsal fin of a shark or a bit of black wreckage or weed, or to lose sight of him altogether, when my lazy glance was drawn along the horizon to right abeam of our vessel by a sparkling appearance, which, had it shown in the sky, I should have at once pronounced a very extraordinary luminary. I rubbed my eyes and took another look, then levelled a telescope at it. It lay like a silver dollar upon the sea, with a glitter as of boiling mercury upon it; but what it was, whether white water, or an immense shoal of fish, or an effect produced by some submarine volcanic action, I could not make out.

My prolonged examination called the attention of the others to me, and Edwards sang out, "What d'ye see, Aubyn, that you're staring in that fashion?" For it was plain that I was not inspecting the distant ship.

"Look," said I, "at that starlike object away out there, on a line with the stem of the quarter boat."

"I see it!" cried Miss Inglefield, with an opera-glass at her eyes.

"If the moon was over it I should say it was her reflection," bawled the colonel. "Devilish queer now. What can it be, eh?"

"Whatever it is," said I, "it's coming this way. Do you see it, captain?"

"It resembles a shoal of herrin's," exclaimed Mr. Semple, peering at it through the main rigging.

"It's water to begin with," observed Pipes, using my glass to examine it. "But what's giving it that colour, and why it should be travellin', which it undoubtably is, blessed if I can tell."

We all drew to the rail to watch the singular thing. I have compared it to a silver dollar—a brand-new one. It was a perfect circle; but as it approached it revealed a diameter of about two hundred and fifty feet. It came along like the reflection of a bright star gliding over the deep blue sea, and it was not until it was within a couple of miles that we made it out to consist of water furiously boiling—a circular mass of foam raised about four to six feet above the level of the ocean, with a wild dazzle coming off the snow-white froth of it that contrasted with wonderful effect with the sapphire bosom over which it was sliding at the rate of about fourteen or fifteen miles an hour. It was enough to puzzle a philosopher. There was no cloud over it to account for its existence; nor, now that we saw how it sailed along, was it possible to refer it to volcanic disturbance.

"Egad!" shouted the colonel, "it's heading bang slap for us! Captain, can't you get us out of its road? Why, confound it,

there's foam enough there to smother us—unless its *boiling*, in which case, by heaven ! we shall be cooked before we're drowned."

"The ship'll clear it," exclaimed Pipes. "Mr. Hornby, I'll tell you what it is—it's a whirlwind. I've met 'em in dirty weather, but never on a fine, calm day like this here. But once seen, it's not to be mistook. It's a whirlwind, ladies and gentlemen, a dwarf circular hurricane. But it'll clear us," he exclaimed, describing its course with his hand laid on the rail.

Pipes was right as to its character ; it was steering right athwart the light breeze—a small, raving-mad wind newly escaped from old Neptune's asylum and whirling in delirious joy over its freedom. The circular heap of froth alone marked it ; and all the noise it made was limited to the tearing, boiling, hissing sounds in the white and maddened swirl that formed the base of the rotating transparent column of moving air ; yet that six-foot height of raving, raging water, which one should look at the foot of the Niagara cataract to find a likeness for, fearfully betokened the prodigious power of this lilliputian storm of wind. Twenty minutes or thereabouts, from the time I had sighted it, it passed astern of us, but by not more than twice our ship's length, watched intently by us all, the men forward dropping their work to follow its passage. For my part, over and over again, I feared it would catch us right amidships ; nor was Pipes' eye accurate enough to reassure me, for when it was a mile off he said it would pass us astern, whereas had the wind failed us to the smallest extent, it would have crossed our bows or struck us full. It cleared us, however, and it was a perfect miracle in its way as it swept down to leeward as straight as a crow could fly or a locomotive run. Whether it meant to end its career as a waterspout was not to be known, for in less time than it had taken to come from windward it was out of sight, but to the last it retained its aspect, dwindling into its former star-like look as it crept down to the sea-line and trembled there a few moments ere it melted.

We had a deal to say about it. "Never saw such a sight on the ocean," the colonel bawled ; "but it's common enough in the shape of dust in India, hang it ! When I was stationed in Calcutta, I was once riding along the Chowringhee road when I found myself right in the middle of one of these spiral contrivances. It came down from the sky in a corkscrew of wind, by jingo, clapping over me and my horse as though it was a funnel, and I rode for over two hundred yards in such a whirl of dust and leaves and stuff that, hang me, if some people I knew who had drawn up to get out of the way of the mess, would believe that I was inside it, because they couldn't see through the whirl. But there I was, right enough, though not inconvenienced, by George ! No, it was like being in a bottle—dust, and leaves, and stuff spinning round *you instead of glass*, you know ; but I wanted to see where I was

going, and so I halted, and then the hinder round passed over me, d'ye see, and smothered me."

"Well, ladies and gentlemen," said Pipes, "now that that revolving concern has passed, and all danger's gone along with it, there's no harm in my saying that in my opinion if it had struck us it 'ud either have dismasted or sunk us out of hand."

"Oh, how the wonders of the deep ought to make one love it!" exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield, with an affected shudder.

"There was a ship I knew," continued Pipes, "commanded by a man named Prowse, a man with red hair and one eye, but a good sailor, a person that never needed to look more than once to wind'ard to know what was going to happen. He had his vessel one day in the middle of the Indian Ocean; 'twas finer weather than this, ne'er a cloud to be seen, scarcely a breath of air, and the water heaving like a length of satin in the hands of a shopman showing of the stuff to ladies. Well, Mr. Edwards, true as I stand here, sir, Prowse was in the act of casting his one eye aloft, thinking, as he afterwards told me, of the amount of chafing that was going on up there, when all on a sudden one of these here whirlwinds dropped right down upon the ship out of the air and whipped every spar clean out of the vessel, the masts killing and wounding near a dozen men by their fall. She was a bit of a barque, and in this condition, a mere wreck, did she lay for hard upon three weeks, Prowse not having hands enough to rig up any kind of jury mast. She was then sighted by a steamer and towed to the Mauritius. I had the story from Prowse himself, and there's ne'er a doubt, Mr. Hornby, that he spoke the truth."

One may suppose that talk of this kind made us follow the flight of the meteoric rush of colourless squall with profound interest and gratitude. It was a sight not often to be seen in fine weather, though for all that, it is to be counted among the perils of the deep. I remember, when talking about it again at dinner that day, old Pipes made some very sensible observations.

"It's too much the custom," said he, "among landsmen to think of sea-dangers as composed of stranding, burning, springing a leak, capsizing and collisions. But who's going to tell me of the scores of ships and hundreds of lives which have been lost at sea by causes it wouldn't enter any man's but a sailor's head—ay, and an old sailor's head, too, to conceive of? There was Jim Paton, master of a vessel called the *Newcastle*, who told me that one night in a dead calm off Cape Leeuwin——"

"Where's that?" asked Edwards.

"Sou'west point of the continent of Australia, sir. Off Cape Leeuwin, he says, a big ball of fire fell out of the sky close aboard of him. It looked, he said, as big as a balloon, and it made the water boil, and it hove up a sea that caused the vessel to roll her rails under. Had the bolt struck him, he said, he'd have gone

down like a dipsy lead ; and there'd have been nothing left to show what had become of the ship. Then there was Joe Turner, mate of the *Diamond Harbour*, who declared to me that one day in a heavy sea a whale came up and ran full at the ship's bows, starting the stem-piece and keeping all hands at the pumps till they could make the nearest port. Had she been a smaller vessel, or less strong, she'd have foundered under the blow. It was like a block of houses coming against her. Then there was Captain Grummet, of the *Mosquito*, who'd say that in the South Atlantic, his ship was hove over on to her beam ends, the water washing as high as the fair-headers by an explosion which he reckoned to be an earthquake ; it hove the water up right under the ship into a sea twenty foot high ; the man at the wheel let go and fell overboard, and the crew who were below at dinner all fetched away in a lump to leeward, and lay scrambling there unable to gain the deck till the vessel had righted. Ah ! " he exclaimed with a solemn shake of his square face, " there's more happens at sea than's known to mortal man. Many pass all their lives at it and meet with nothing uncommon ; others see enough during a short service to fill their faces as full of wrinkles as a monkey's has when it grins. But the ocean lies naked under the heavens, and God's eye is right over it, which is a good job for sailors," and he shot a moist glance through the skylight, whilst Hornby said : " Yes, it's comforting to feel that one is watched over and all that sort of thing, don't you know," in as pious a croak as ever I had heard him deliver.

Well, we got hold of the Trade Wind, and with swelling stunsails and roaring bows, swept in true clipper fashion down past the parallels of the Canaries and on to those of the Cape de Verdes without anything to break the pleasant sameness of the days, unless it were the cry of " Sail ho ! " now and again. But the north-east wind failed us when within seven degrees of the equator, and this side the line we had an eight days' taste of what sailors call the Doldrems, by which curious word is signified a belt of calms right under the sun. I believe we should have fretted under this stagnation if it hadn't been for the magical medicine it proved to Mr. Edwards. Bit by bit he had been picking up, till before we had run out of the Trades he was walking about with a step positively elastic, and though now and again he'd grumble over a twinge in his foot or a shooting in his hand, he never appeared to find anything worse to complain about. Diet, fresh air, plenty of salt water, cheerfulness, the utter reversal of shore-going habits, and the animating hope that had been excited in him when he found himself improving were doing a work that was far beyond the reach of medicine. And the heat and calms of the equatorial parallels seemed to confirm the cure. I don't mean to say for a moment that the gout had gone out of his blood, nor that his swellings had much diminished ; but the old arthritic anguish had

disappeared; he protested when we had reached the latitudes which at noon hung the sun almost over our maintruck, that he felt more like a schoolboy than a gouty old fogey, and we all thought that if so much benefit had been derived by the passage of the North Atlantic, the utmost was to be hoped from the whole voyage that would carry us twice across the line, and twice through the two great oceans it divided.

Yet, as I have said, we should have chafed over the eight days of tropical detention under a sky of violet and a sea of molten brass, but for Edwards' excellent health and his profound enjoyment of the change wrought in him. Why, for ninety-six hours, by day or by night, not a catspaw crawled its blemish upon the glaring mirror in the middle of which we lay, or frosted a fathom's length of starlight reflection. Round and round we'd slew, with our head at breakfast-time at north, and at luncheon-time at south, and at dinner-time at west. The awning made a shady place, but often you'd be wakened out of a doze by the slowly-swinging vessel subtly sneaking the roasting sunshine right on to you, and you'd open your eyes against a fierce light that broiled upon you as though it came out of a sky of red-hot copper. The pitch was soft as honey in the seams, the paint blistered and broke into sickly smells, every rope you touched was as hot as a poker left with one end sticking into the fire; yet there were some beautiful things to admire, as for instance, the filming and silvering of the edges of the sails into the dark blue air, and the exquisite green transparency of the water over the side which showed you the waving yellow metal of the ship till a bend hid it; and then there was the ocean of a wondrous blue at its surface, with the sea-line in places melting into haze, and here and there a streak of silvery water like an iridescent coating of oil upon the profound and glorious sapphire that made one think of ice; and sunsets of ruby flames and blood-red western waters, behind whose ensanguined line the rayless orb would descend in a vast palpitating disc, trailing its majestic attire of golden robe over the deep with it, whilst the heavens, too, far past the zenith, were armoured with links of light, scarlet, terrible in brilliancy, softening into rose-red, then the yellow of virgin, shining gold, delicate orange waning into a sulphurous tinge that died out in a green sky, against which the eastern horizon stood in a line of amber-coloured glass. Yet it was the night that made the greater wonder of that breathless spell of ocean rest; moonless for a little while, for we had outlived the bland and beautiful planet that had lighted our midnight rushing through the Trades, yet radiant with stars of the first magnitude which filled the black shadow upon which the *Silver Sea* slumbered with tiny pools of light and glittering with luminous dust beyond. Often we'd keep the deck at night till *eight vibrating strokes* upon the bell warned us that the middle watch had begun. None could think of bed with the cool dew

flaking the rails and skylights for the stars to sparkle in, and with the softly beating canvas wafting cool eddies of air along as though some gigantic dusky punkah-wallah was seated at the mastheads armed with an immense fan.

These were hours when I'd find a mystery in Miss Edwards's beauty, that made me not a little pensive when I had her alone in some quiet part of the quarter-deck with her eyes trembling from the starlight flowing off the sea into them, and her voice tuned low in correspondence with the subduing majesty of the mystical silence, the starlit hush of the tropical ocean night. The stillness that came out of the viewless distance,—for the water melted into the stars at the horizon, and the points of quicksilver in the sea made the deep look as hollow as the sky,—would often force our voices into faltering whispers as we leaned over the rail and gazed into the measureless dimness. Hornby's shrill jabber could not disconcert us; Edwards's hearty laugh, the colonel's bawling tones, Mrs. Inglesfield's affected talk, were rather helps as accentuations than discomposing elements; one found the mighty, spangled shadow the more solemn, and separate, and awful, for the prosaic reality of those notes; though it was different with all sounds which came from the ship—the creak of a timber, the clank of a chain, the enfolding caress of a sail; for *these* were noises to properly fit the night and deepen its meaning.

But Hornby dodged Miss Edwards so diligently that it was not very often I could enjoy her society; and then I would betake myself to Miss Agnes; for, to speak the truth, next to being alone (which was not always respectful) I liked best the society of one or the other of the girls; for the calm, the tranquillity, the dew, the sweetness, of these nights were not to be tasted in the company of the colonel, and the shipowner, and Mrs. Inglesfield, and Edwards. I was young and had my fancies; they were old, and though they had fancies too, they were not of my sort. - Stock Exchange talk, army blundering, the disastrous influence of the Board of Trade on English mercantile shipping, marriages in high life, official corruption in India, the intentions of the Government, the increasing menace to civilization involved by the spread of Radicalism, panaceas for Irish distempers, and the religious opinions of the prime minister, were not topics to suit my taste in a dead calm, beneath a glorious sky of stars, and with the equator close under the ship's bows. They did not interest the girls either, and so one or the other, and sometimes both, were glad to get away from the arguing group and join me in a look at old ocean and a quiet talk upon such thoughts as its mighty presence, and the shadow of the ship, and the flashing of meteors, and a faint violet glare of lightning among the stars close down upon the horizon would put into us.

I greatly preferred Miss Edwards's society to Miss Inglesfield's,

not only because of her beauty, though one wanted nothing better to be alone with, but because of the vivacity and poetry of her conversation, through which there ran such a perfume of sentiment as made it wonderfully fragrant. Her imagination was like her eyes, soft and searching and full of fire ; and sometimes, when the humour seized her, or when a high mood was put into her by something of beauty—a particular bright star, the curling and shooting of phosphorescent fires alongside the ship, the fiery outline of a fish under the black surface—she'd lift our conversation into fancies that came often to a sheer struggling of imagination on my side, so nimble was her genius in that way, and so hard I found it, not indeed to keep abreast of her, but to hold her within hail. She was indeed a girl of singular intelligence, and she was superbly emotional ; and every intellectual quality in her was helped by the regality of her airs, and the beauty of her face which gave music to all she said as her eyes made it eloquent ; and yet one had to step within the atmosphere of her to feel her fascination, at least to speak for myself. I never found her handsomer, her voice clearer and more song-like, her eyes more noble, and womanly, and winning than when I was looking at her and conversing with her, which would not have been the case had there been more magic in her witchery ; for let me tell you that the women who charm most are the women who gain most by the idealization of memory : for to admire best when you are gazing and listening is to admit that the impression left is too shallow for passion to find a good foundation in.

I have said I preferred her society to Miss Inglefield's : so I did whilst I was in her company, but when I was with Miss Agnes I never lamented that I was not with Miss Margaret. How much is meant by this you will see at a glance ; it is no tribute to either ; it means, I suppose, that I wasn't in love. Indeed, I'll go further yet and say this : that though when walking and talking with Miss Edwards, I'd think it would cost a man a long hunt to find a handsomer, statelier, cleverer lady, yet I'd find a kind of quieter pleasure in being alone with the other, more repose for my mind in her timidity, her childish pretty fancies and ways ; it was like putting one's head upon a soft pillow after sitting in a splendid chair of state ; it was like stooping to a violet after gazing at a sparkling planet ; or, ladies, it was like slipping a rosebud in the hair after wearing a heavy, costly, flashing tiara.

There would have been room for a bit of love-making aboard the *Silver Sea*. I was a single man, anyhow, though what other charms I had I'll leave to your imagination ; if the north-east Trades had kept us in a hurry, there was abundant leisure and idleness in the long calm that fell upon us when we were deep in the heart of the tropical zone. But if ever I had felt any flutterings towards Miss Edwards, they had never approached to anything like a flight that

way, simply because I could not get it out of my head that it was impossible for such a woman to have arrived at her age without having bestowed her affections; and it amounted to a conviction with me that if I should ever take the trouble to grope and sound for information, I'd discover that Mr. Philip Aubyn proved himself a man of consummate good sense in limiting his emotions to profound admiration. As to Hornby's pursuit, why, it was merely laughable, nothing that could weigh at all, just the behaviour of a small old widower hopping about a handsome woman without reference to her thoughts and intentions, and acting as a man will, whether big or little, who has nobody at home in a cap to ask him what he means by acting like a fool. But there was no love-making, though once or twice as we floated across the blue sea over the equator, wafted by burning airs which came from all quarters like an expiring fold of atmosphere from a blast furnace below the horizon, methought I might have found a chance with Miss Agnes, when we'd be leaning together over the rail or standing right aft past the man at the wheel, watching the eddying blue gleams in the short and sluggish wake; for I was egotistical enough to think, when darkness favoured her timidity, and she would talk freely with her little hand in my arm, that I could interpret a distinct enjoyment of my company in her gentle, pretty manners.

But be all this as it might, imperceptibly our keel, helped by Pipes's and his mates' vigilant eyes for every breath of air, sneaked through the deep, and noon on July 14 found us within six miles of the equator.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WE PLAN A RACE.

A LIGHT air, with scarcely enough weight in it to wrinkle the water, had been blowing us along on the morning of July 15, since day-break. Every sail that could catch the soft draught breathing over the starboard quarter so faintly that it seemed to die in its effort to reach the ship, was set. From the main truck to the flying-jib-boom-end the *Silver Sea* was a white cloud with a dazzle of sunshine upon the canvas that struck a mother-o'-pearl-like reflection through the thin, blue ripples under her, as you could have told by looking at the gleaming outline of the mirrored lower stunsail under the swinging boom. We had had so much of zephyr fannings and sleeping seas that the continued sluggishness was becoming extremely tiresome. One had a right to gaze aloft for the Trade clouds hereabouts, and to listen for the hearty whistling of the south-easter in the breasts of the braced-up topsails. But over us stretched the

same cloudless sky we had been crawling under for some days past. The sapphire folds went deepening to the horizon till, dark blue as the ocean was, it looked but a silvery azure where its line ruled the wonderful firmament. And the sea was strangely calm. We might have been in the Straits of Dover on a breathless summer day rather than in the middle of a vast ocean which, north and south, ran in water to the ice of either pole, and east and west washed the shores of continents three thousand miles asunder. There was indeed a delicate heaving in the sea, but so long drawn that the ship's swing to it was barely noticeable, and so light and low that it took no lustre from the sunlight as it rolled.

At breakfast one heard a few murmurs.

"I say, captain," cried the colonel, "don't want to suggest that there is the smallest probability of your being out, you know ; but is it in the faintest degree likely, do you think, that we miscalculated our longitude ? for its deuced odd we don't get the Trades unless we are away somewhere off the Amazon or dried up off Cape Palmas."

Pipes, with his eyes squarely fixed on little Hornby, declined to hear the question.

"Where does the south-east Trade Wind usually begin to blow ?" asked Edwards.

"I've picked it up north of the line, within an hour of losing the north-east Trades," replied Pipes. "Another time I've ratched as far as twelve degrees south without meeting with it. These here winds are, like the ladies," he continued, smiling at Miss Inglefield ; "they'll come greeting and caressing when you're not particularly anxious for their fondness, and they'll hold off and keep out of sight when you're languishin' for their kindness."

"And pray, Captain Pipes," exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield, "what sort of a man can he be, I should like to know, who is never particularly anxious for ladies' fondness ?"

"Well, here and there a married man," answered Pipes, who was of a literal nature, and always in earnest when arguing. "I don't say it was becoming in them, ma'am ; but I have known wedded individuals to be kissed by their wives at times when they were by no means solicitous for any kind of endearments." And he gazed round the table to see if any of us agreed with him.

"I like the heat and the smoothness," said Edwards, smothering a laugh, "but the tediousness is trying. A breeze gives you a sense of doing something, though you may be sitting with your hands before you ; but a prolonged calm sinks into the soul, and the very feelings stagnate."

"Yes, like an old well. All sorts of fancies get into the mind, like tittlebats in a foul pond," shouted the colonel.

"That accounts for the queer things the 'Ancient Mariner' saw *after the calm* had lasted some time," said I.

"What did he see, Mr. Aubyn?" inquired Pipes.

"Why, slimy things that did crawl with legs upon the slimy sea," I answered.

"Gor! bless me!" cried the old fellow; "where might that have been now?"

"Why, the 'Ancient Mariner' was no doubt talking about the equator," I remarked; "but the slimy things he saw along with those other animals,

"Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam, and every track
Was a flash of golden fire,"

were no doubt the tittlebats the colonel speaks of; unpleasant objects generated in his mind through the stagnation of his feelings by the calm."

"It's many years since I read the 'Ancient Mariner,'" said Hornby; "but I recollect he had a very useful eye, an eye he had only to turn upon a man to compel him to listen, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. If I were a member of Parliament, I should wish to have an eye like that. All you need do would be to fix it upon the Speaker, and there you are; you could go on firing away, and any impatience you could quell in a moment, you know, by just looking."

"It would be an eye to make love with," said Mrs. Inglefield. "However disagreeable the man, the woman would have to listen."

"Yes," exclaimed Miss Edwards; "but only listen."

"What I'm thinking of," remarked Mr. Edwards, yawning as he lifted a cup of tea, "is this calm. How are we to kill the time? It's too hot for quoits; one feels too languid for whist; even smoking makes one perspire, and as to reading—well, I never was much of a reader, though I miss my morning paper."

"Couldn't we get up a swimming match?" said Hornby.

"For the amusement of the sharks, do you mean?" I asked.

"Oh, I forgot *them*," exclaimed the little fellow, giving his nose a quick rub.

"Edwards," bawled the colonel, with a loud laugh, "one of the most interesting incidents of this voyage, do you know, would be a swimming bout 'twixt you and Hornby. Why," cried he, with another laugh, addressing the shipowner, "you need only swim a little ahead of Edwards, by George, to be mistaken for a pilot-fish with a shark behind him. Eh? eh?" shoving his grinning, hairy face at us one after the other, "isn't that a deuced good idea, by Jingo, eh? What d'ye say, Hornby? Will you become a pilot-fish and give us a good laugh, eh, now? Damme, Edwards, *that* would pass the time."

Pipes looked scandalized by this profane handling of the shipowner, whilst I noticed the little chap give his hair a fierce twist over his ear.

as he glanced at Miss Edwards. Mrs. Inglefield, with her hand shading her eyes and her head stooped, struggled with laughter till her tight figure seemed to be in throes. Just then the chief mate, who had quietly come down the steps and taken his place at the foremost table, said, "There's a dismasted vessel away down on the lee bow."

"How far off?" asked Pipes.

"Her hull just shows upon the horizon. She's a mere speck to the eye, but plain in the glass, the air is so bright," responded Mr. Bird.

"What a lot of wrecks there are!" exclaimed Mrs. Inglefield. "This will make the third we've met in six weeks."

"You can't rightly call the derelicts we've come across *wrecks*, ma'am," observed Pipes. "They were, and yet they *warn't*, properly speaking. This here vessel Mr. Bird reports is more in that line. She'll be the result of a gale of wind, no doubt. What am I to do, Mr. Hornby? hold on, or what, sir? we don't want any more alarms."

"No," cried the little man acrimoniously, with an angry look at the colonel, "we don't want any more alarms, as you say."

"Oh, let's steer for her," exclaimed Edwards. "She'll prove a diversion, a time-killer, the very thing we want; and after we've satisfied our curiosity, we may get a breeze. You don't object, colonel?"

"Certainly not," answered the colonel.

"You won't feel nervous, I mean," continued Edwards blandly, whilst Hornby grinned.

"Nervous! why should I?" cried the colonel, reddening. "Gad, Edwards, you put your questions in confoundedly odd language. Nervous!" he repeated, frowning at Hornby, "why, by George, I'll go on board of her if you like—and alone, too, by Jove!"

"That you certainly sha'n't," said his wife.

"Well, captain, as nobody's afraid," observed Edwards, laughing, "you'll please steer for the wreck; eh, Hornby? Don't suppose there'll be much to see, or there'll be anybody on board of her, but she'll help kill the morning, anyhow."

It was not more the news than the heat that made us hurry over breakfast. Despite an awning that stretched the length of the quarter-deck, and a wind-sail down each skylight, the cabin was desperately hot, though the difference out of it was not very much, for the ship's soft slipping away from the light air that chased us left the atmosphere calm, whilst we were deprived of the draughts we should have got from the flapping of the lower canvas, had the ship leaned without headway upon the gentle swell. The wreck was plainly enough to be seen six or seven miles off on our lee bow; *a middling big black hull she looked, without a stick standing, fairly high out of water, too, though she was yet so mere an inky speck that she'd regularly go out of sight behind the long, depressed blue*

folks. It was a quarter to ten, the sun stood at our main-top-gallant yardarm, and already his light was so fierce that the heat of whatever black or metal thing he shone upon was not to be endured by the hand. Clear as the atmosphere was, there was yet observable a swimming look where the dark blue of the sky met the lighter blue of the ocean away to the left of the wreck, that I took to be a haze of heat drawing up out of the air. A burning, brassy brightness came glaring off the sun's reflection, and there was every assurance of the faint breeze dying, though just now the *Silver Sea* had way enough upon her to keep the water wrinkling round her bows and rippling past with a brook-like murmur that one only wanted a cooler atmosphere to find soothing and refreshing.

I noticed Miss Inglefield seated alone on a skylight with her hand to her forehead, and went up to her. She looked pale and in pain, and told me that her head ached terribly. I asked her if she had exposed herself to the sun; she answered no, so it was certain it was not a sunstroke, though there was a dazed appearance in her eyes that might have made one think it so.

"It is the burning dazzle that comes from there," said she, pointing to the flashing and broiling splendour under the sun upon the water; "it fills my eyes like a fever."

Miss Edwards now approached, and learning what was the matter, advised the girl to go below and lie down. They went to the cabin together, and then Mrs. Inglefield called me to know what was wrong with her daughter. "Oh," said she to her husband when I had answered, "one of Agnes's headaches. She always suffers from her head in extremely hot weather, Mr. Aubyn. It's a wonder, I'm sure, that I'm not prostrated—it's quite killing, this morning," and she fanned her hot, powdered face vehemently.

Fathom by fathom we crept along, our lighter sails steady, the lower and heavier canvas hanging up and down. It was enough to afflict a man with a calenture to look over the side into the deep, gleaming, blue profound over which the passage of the ship strewed a handful of bubbles that winked like diamonds and rubies and emeralds in the hues they took as they veered astern betwixt the shadow of the hull and the lustre on the water; one wanted at all risks to take a header and float lazily in the cool, glassy, serene element; but this put the thought of sharks into my head, and I went to the traffrail and had a good peer round for a malignant bluish outline, or the wet sparkle of a black fin, hoping for sport to break our sluggish passage to the wreck; however, the rippled surface was bare, and a man up in the mizzen-top answered my hail, after a careful survey, by saying there was nothing of the kind to be seen from aloft.

A dead calm had fallen at eight bells, and before the steward summoned us to the table the wreck had sheered away from our beam, to dead astern; for, like a sentient, irritated creature, the *Silver Sea* was shoving her head round into all the quarters of

the compass, as though looking for a breeze. Through the glass the hull we had been making for showed herself the remains of a large sailing ship, apparently of North American build, with a quantity of gilt scroll-work upon her elliptical stern, her sides a dead black with a foot or two of green metal sheathing above water. Her mizzen shrouds trailed from the dead eyes overboard, but not a spar was left; she looked as clean in that respect as if she had just slid down the ways from the builder's hands. There was a large white deck-house forward. Her wheel was gone, there was no sign of a boat nor of anybody living being on board of her. Had she been the first derelict we had come across, maybe we should have found something to deeply interest us in this lonely object afloat and deserted leagues and leagues out upon the sea. But the vessels we had sighted in the first days of our voyage had taken the edge off whatever curiosity the sight raised in us. It was a mere repetition, we all felt; though God knows, had we guessed what that black, sheer hulk there was to signify, there was not a spectacle in the wide world that would have opened our eyes wider, nor filled our hearts with more consternation and dread.

However, it was a subject to talk about, and when we sat down to lunch we naturally enough fell to conversing about floating abandoned ships, and the value of the numerous cargoes which at all times of the year were tossing about upon the various oceans in hulls and wrecks of all sorts waiting for gales of wind to break them up and sink them.

"I've sometimes thought," said the colonel, "that it would be a good idea to start a company for the purpose of despatching steamboats to tow in any distressed, abandoned vessels they came across. The more numerous ships become the more numerous will accidents be. The salvage ought to pay a dividend of thirty per cent., and there would be other sources of profit, as in towing vessels, for instance."

"Not at all a bad idea, colonel," exclaimed Edwards. "Take ourselves: we have only been a few weeks out upon the sea, and during that time we have encountered two abandoned sailing ships, both of which I dare say we could have saved, and a distressed steamer."

"Oh, don't mention the steamer," said Hornby with a gloomy face; "she ought to have been worth several thousand pounds to me. But I'll put in a claim for the towage we gave her, anyhow."

"And now," said I, "we have a fourth vessel to make money out of."

Hornby looked up at me, whilst the colonel said, "How d'ye mean—make money out of her? how's it to be done?"

"Well, I suppose she'll be full of cargo, eh, captain?" said I.

"Don't know, I'm sure, Mr. Aubyn; she looks middling light; but no doubt there'll be something inside her," replied Pipes.

"And supposing she *is* full of cargo—what are we to do with it?" exclaimed Hornby with his little head fixed in a somewhat eager posture on one side.

"Why, we're an empty ship," said I: "nothing easier, you know, than to fill up with the hulk's cargo."

"Could it be done, captain?" demanded Edwards, laughing.

"Why, yes, it could be done," responded Pipes; "but it 'ud need a pretty long spell of fine weather; and then a good deal 'ud depend upon what the cargo is. If it should be coal, now—"

"Oh, coal is horrible!" cried Mrs. Inglefield. "Charley, you know how fearfully black sailors are who work in coal ships."

"An idea strikes me," exclaimed Mr. Edwards. "Let's make up a party and row over to the hull and see what's inside her."

"I'm quite willing," cried Hornby. "Tell you what, Edwards: we'll get up a match; get two boats out, and have a race for it, hey? Why, Pipes, it'll be good exercise for the men, won't it?—and there must be money in it, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, that the stakes may be divided among the winning crew."

"For peace and quietness' sake, gentlemen," quoth Pipes, "suppose the winning crew get two-thirds, and the others the rest?"

"All right," exclaimed Edwards; "I'll give a couple of sovereigns."

"No, no, say a pound, Edwards, say a pound," said Hornby; "and I'll give a pound."

"And I'll give a pound," said I.

"And I'll give ten shillings," shouted the colonel. "It's more than a good many generals could afford."

We were all now in a fair way to becoming excited. The mere idea of a race was delightful to our British souls; and then again, what could better fill the long, dull, sultry, stagnant afternoon that stretched before us?

"But d'ye mean, Edwards, that we should get into the boats also?" demanded the colonel.

"Certainly," replied Edwards; "otherwise how are we to know what the wreck contains?"

"But will your limbs let you manage it?"

"Why, yes, with a bit of help. There's nothing I'm fonder of than being pulled about in an open boat. You'll join us, of course," he added, looking at the colonel with a smile in the corner of his eyes.

"Certainly, certainly," cried the colonel in a fussy manner, not a little suggestive of subdued irritation; "didn't I say I'd go alone, by George, if I was challenged to do it? I suppose there's every chance of the calm lasting, though?"

"Too much of a chance, I'm afraid, sir," said Pipes, with a dejected shake of the head.

Miss Edwards said she would enjoy the trip very much : she could not imagine anything more interesting than standing on board a wreck amid the loneliness of the ocean ; it would be very hot on the water of course, but an umbrella would give her all the shelter she needed. Mrs. Inglefield was more reluctant ; she wanted to know how she was to get into the boat ? Was everybody perfectly certain that there was not the least danger ? Would not the sun scorch her up, and make her a perfect fright ? And how was she to get on to the wreck ; and when there, mightn't it sink with them all ? Pipes, who did not comprehend the pleasure she took in posturing, and who probably, had the latter been explained to him, could not have understood how her coyness and fears and hysterical wonderings were going to make people fancy her younger than she was, reassured her on every point she started. And so eventually the excursion was thus arranged : Five men in one boat with Mr. Bird in charge, and Edwards, his daughter, and Hornby as one party ; five men in another boat with Mr. Semple at the yoke-lines, and the colonel, his wife, and myself as the other party. Miss Inglefield's headache, though better, would not permit her to accompany us.

When we went on deck there was the wreck, a long pull distant, like the hull of a boy's model in size, and the water between a sheet of softly waving dark blue glass. The *Silver Sea* had slewed her starboard beam on to the abandoned craft, at which I took another long and careful look through the most powerful telescope we mustered without discovering the least hint of life of any kind. There could be little doubt that her hull was staunch and tight enough ; and in all probability her crew had been taken off her by some passing vessel that was unable to render the utterly dismayed and helpless craft any other service. Past her, where I had noticed the hot tremulousness of the atmosphere over the water-line, the blue of the sky had paled, and there was a kind of dim merging of ocean into heaven there, not visible in any other part of the circle that went in a soft, unbroken indigo sweep sheer round ; but it could signify nothing but heat, I imagined, and that conviction stopped me from thinking of it. The notion of the excursion being Edwards', he threw himself into it with great zeal and spirit. It was wonderful to see him actively moving about, judging the best of our quarter-boats for the pull, and to contrast his willingness to go over the side and climb aboard the distant wreck, with his groans and limping when he had mounted our gangway ladder, leaning on me, in Plymouth Sound. But the weather was altogether on his side, and the dry, fierce heat of the sunshine suited his distemper perfectly. Hornby was in high feather. There was no telling what fancies ran in his mind, nor what dreams my joking reference to the wreck's cargo had raised in his little soul. The colonel, I believe, was not so easy. I found it hard to keep my face when I saw him frowning over the bulwarks at the wreck, and,

as it might be, measuring the distance between, and then taking a good look round to make quite sure that it was everywhere blue and calm and cloudless. If it had not been for his brag about boarding the hull alone, one might have sworn, from the working of his features and the probing of his head, that he would have invented some excuse to back out of the excursion.

Well, as to danger, the most nervous, broken-down wretch who ever sweated at the scratching of a mouse, could have witnessed not the faintest hint of peril in the race and the trip to the wreck. It was not only that the boats of the *Silver Sea* were new, sound, and in first-rate order; the deep was as calm as ever Windermere was, or a Scotch loch under a still July evening, saving always that there ran through it a delicate azure swell whose summits were much too depressed to give a sinuosity to the horizon, though there was just weight enough in it to stir the ship and raise a pleasant murmuring aloft.

"How long shall we be away?" Miss Edwards asked me as we stood waiting for the first and second mates to select their crews.

"Why," said I, looking at my watch, "if we get away by two, we should be back by four."

"Is the race to be there and back again, or there only, Edwards?" inquired Hornby.

"There only; one way will be quite enough for the men under this sun," replied Edwards. "The boat whose bowman touches the wreck's side first with a boathook will be the winner, eh? that'll save a dispute should we arrive neck and neck."

"Yes," cried the colonel; "but I hope the people who steer won't run the boats stem-on into the wreck, for that might crumble us up and send us to the bottom—a deuced awkward ending to the excursion, by George!"

"Better let the mates and the men settle the terms of the race," said I.

By this time all hands had mustered aft, and first Mr. Bird chose one and then Mr. Semple another, each man as his name was mentioned standing aside. I often recall that picture; see the big, hulking Finn lazily hanging back, and most of the others looking eagerly, evidently pleased with the notion of the race, and more so by the prospect of getting money by it. It was a break in the dull monotony of their routine, and the childlike character of the sailor was expressed in the grins of the chosen men as in answer to their names they stepped forward and waited till the mates had done choosing. The seamen picked out were the following:—for Mr. Edwards's boat, Mark Shaftoe, the boatswain, as stroke; Christopher Dent, Joseph Blackett, Matthew Scarfe, and Erick Stenlund, all A.B.'s; coxswain, Mr. Allan Bird, chief officer. For the colonel's boat:—Frank Staves, carpenter, as stroke; Gustaffson, Josiah Bitting, Alfred Claw, O.S., Jacob Roband; coxswain, Mr. Nicholas Semple; second mate. They were the best of the men

indeed they formed pretty nearly the whole ship's company. At a given signal they sprang aft, cast adrift the gribes of the selected boats, and in a few minutes had them in the water.

"Let us take some spirits and a beaker of water with us," said Hornby. "It'll be thirsty work for the men, you know."

These things were procured and lowered into each boat, and then the gangway ladder was got over the side for the convenience of the ladies and Mr. Edwards.

"This is the way to kill time at sea," exclaimed Edwards, as he went to the side holding his daughter's arm, "Colonel, our party'll get in first. Come along, Hornby," and he stepped with amazing ease on to the ladder.

When they were seated, their crew made way for the other boat.

"Lead the way, colonel," said I; "I'll follow with Mrs. Inglefield."

He went down with a grumbling, agitated face, whilst I held Mrs. Inglefield's hand.

"You are *sure* there is no danger, Mr. Aubyn?" she exclaimed with a little shudder as she went over the side, gripping me tightly and glancing away out at sea; "you know what a timid creature I am."

"Not an atom of danger, I assure you," I replied. "Here, Mr. Semple, give the lady your arm to lean upon—so."

"I say," cried Edwards at this moment, "our crew here think that the boats are not properly weighted."

"How's that? I answered.

"Beg your pardon," said the boatswain, standing up, "but as there's money in this here job, it's but right we should start fair."

"The fact is," call out Mr. Bird, whilst Mr. Edwards laughed out, "the men think that the freight would be more equal if Mr. Hornby got into your boat, Mr. Aubyn."

I knew that this referred to Mr. Edwards's large stature and weight, though the men did not like to put their objection into plain words, but it was clear by Edwards's laughter that he understood them.

"Why, that would mak' foor to two," sang out Mr. Semple whilst some among our crew exclaimed, "No, no, that wouldn't be fair."

"Well, sir," said the boatswain, addressing Mr. Bird, "all I can say is, speaking for my mates here, that it'll be no race if the boats' weights aren't hequalized."

"What's to be done?" cried Mr. Edwards. "My men here are quite right; there's money in the race, and we ought to start fair."

"Why," I answered, still standing on the steps, "let Mr. Hornby take my place. I'd just as soon stop aboard the ship."

This produced a hubbub; both Edwards and Hornby shouted *that I must go*; Hornby, indeed, was particularly noisy, being *evidently unwilling* to quit the side of Miss Edwards; then the

colonel stood up and said that rather than that I should lose the pleasure of the race, *he* would remain behind ; on which his wife instantly declared that she would not dream of going without him. However, it was the boat's crew who were entitled to our chief consideration, since the labour would be theirs, and if Mr. Semple's boat reached the wreck first there would be no lack of discontent and ill-feeling ; and this being already pretty well threatened by the looks of them, it ended, after a hot discussion of about ten minutes' length, in Mr. Edwards consenting to my remaining on board the *Silver Sea*, and in Mr. Hornby most reluctantly and sourly quitting Mr. Bird's boat for Mr. Semple's.

"Now, shall I start ye?" shouted Captain Pipes, who stood in the gangway with his square face embellished with a broad smile, over which you could see the perspiration hopping like parched peas.

"Yes, yes ; you start us, Pipes !" cried Edwards.

"Then, Mr. Bird and Mr. Semple," called out Pipes, "get your boats in station under the jibboom ; let the shadow of the spar span your stern-sheets, and I'll get on to the fo'ksle head, and when I say one, two, three—then, at the word three, off you go, my lads !"

Now, I may as well own here that had I been cast off for the boat occupied by Miss Edwards, I should not have very readily foregone the excursion. But I confess I saw no treat in sitting with the colonel and his wife under a broiling sun. I don't fancy any of them quite realized the sort of atmosphere they would find after a bit betwixt the vertical burning dazzle and the red-hot metallic glare off the glass-like surface they were afloat on ; though one saw that Miss Edwards had made some kind of guess at it by the wide straw hat she had put on, and the big umbrella covered with white which she held over her. She might have seen much to admire in the *Silver Sea* as the five oars carried the boat she was in ahead of us ; but methought there was more of wistfulness than of admiration in her beautiful eyes as she kept them bent on the vessel, and I fancy that any one who had wagered that she was there simply and purely to oblige her father, and humour this whim of his to kill a dead, long, sultry afternoon—for that reason only and entirely against her own inclinations, would have been pretty sure to win the bet.

I followed Pipes on to the fore-castle, for the ship had now swung so as to bring the wreck abreast of the port fore-rigging, and there was no better place to start the boats than from under the jibbooms. It was hard to realize that we were in the middle of a vast ocean, so glassy smooth was the water, so gentle the undulations, so still the air. The reflection of the boats and their occupants in the light blue surface was as clear and as full of colour as the image of things in a soap-bubble. As I peered over the bows, I saw the ship's figurehead, the curve of her stem, her head-boards, the great

bowsprit and jibbooms soaring out with the lightly swaying jibs upon the stays, hanging in the polished azure faintness with a startling distinctness, stealing up with every gentle droop of the fabric upon the swell, like another ship coming up out of the sea.

"Aubyn, you're missing a great treat, man," cried Edwards, pulling out a cigar, and looking up at me with high glee. "It's delightful down here."

"Miss Edwards," I called to her, "please be more careful of the sun's reflection on the water than of the sun himself. It's the glare that comes off the surface that roasts the skin."

She peeped up at me from under her umbrella, smiling, the white of her teeth, the sparkling of her dark eyes, the tender damask of her cheeks, making a lovely picture indeed of her face in the shadow of the protection she held, that was like a frame against the vivid brightness of the water which went up past her to the sea-line.

"Are we all ready?" shouted the colonel. "If we go on waiting much longer, it'll be dark, before we get back."

"Yes, yes, let's get away!" echoed Hornby, who looked far from happy as he sat, a very small figure indeed, by the side of Mrs. Inglefield, who in dimensions might have passed for the mother of the little chap, what with her large bust and fat figure tightly clothed in a check silk dress, and a grey straw hat looped up on one side, showing her hair yellow as sulphur with dye, whilst a sunshade, green inside, cast its somewhat bilious shadow upon her powdered face and her two or three chins. The crews, stripped to their shirts, their arms and bosoms bare, and feet naked, lay upon their extended, gleaming oars, watching for the signal from old Pipes. What a marvellous thing is memory! I have them before me now, as I write, as distinctly as I saw them then; the grinning faces of some of them, the looks they'd direct to make sure the boats were in line, here and there a dark, determined countenance that you felt belonged to a man who would pull with his teeth clenched when the order came; and I also see the huge Finn, John Grondhal, lounging at the starboard nighthead with a short pipe in his mouth, and Breechings, the cook, the idiot who had ruined Miss Inglefield's gull, and Solomon Eye, an ordinary seaman, along with Shingles, the steward, and "John," as we called his German assistant, staring at the boats with open-mouthed expectation for the start, over the headrail.

"Now, are you all ready?" cried Pipes.

"All ready, sir," sung back Mr. Bird, whilst Mr. Semple called out, "Arle ready here, sir."

The blade of every oar swung forward.

"One—two—THREE!" yelled Pipes, and off went the boats, blurring the breathless, translucent surface just as a sprinkling of water dims and breaks up the shining expanse of a mirror. The *seamen pulled with a good, steady, sturdy, merchant-sailor's stroke; but the boats were not built for racing; they were strong, heavy, sea-*

going structures, and there was little to be done with them in the way of speed, tug as the men would. However, they were well matched. As Pipes and I stood watching them the old fellow chuckled when he recalled the objection of the men to having Hornby as well as Mr. Edwards and his daughter to pull ; "though they were right, Mr. Aubyn," said he ; "Mr. Edwards is a big man, sir ; I'd be glad to have in gold all that he weighs over sixteen stone. Even with Mr. Hornby out of the boat, she's more down by the stern than t'other."

"Well," said I, following the receding boats as they dwindled smaller and smaller, with oars flashing as though the blades were gilded, and a long, thin, gleaming line, like a length of narrow white satin riband, trailing from their rudders over the blue behind them, "the race and the trip are well imagined. A pleasure voyage of this kind wants as many breaks as can be made in it. It's wonderful how the journey has set up Mr. Edwards, though. 'Pon my word, it was a treat to see the nimble manner in which he went over the side."

"Aye, and it's set up the colonel, too," exclaimed Pipes. "A month ago he'd have seen us all at the bottom of the ocean before he'd have ventured his life in one of them boats."

We walked aft, for the shelter of the awning was there, and the sunshine streaming fair down on the fore-castle head was simply grilling. Pipes, after gazing at the boats for a few minutes, went below. Soon afterwards I was in the act of filling a pipe, meaning to watch the excursionists through a glass out of an easy-chair, when Miss Inglefield came on deck.

"I hope you are better ?" said I, placing a seat for her.

"Yes, I am easier ; I have slept a little. But it is so terribly hot in the cabin," she exclaimed, fanning her pale face, and glancing along the ship. "Have they gone ?"

"Yes, there they are," I replied, pointing.

She shaded her blue eyes with her hand to look, and said, "Which is the boat mamma is in ?"

"The one to the left."

"It must be quite burning on the water. I am glad I am not with them, at least, with my headache ; it would make me ill, I am sure, though I should have liked to go on board the wreck."

It happened while she spoke that my sight, going past the wreck to where some time before I had noticed a kind of tremulous thickness in the blue close down upon the sea, I observed a depression in the horizon that extended over about seven or eight points of the compass. The sensible or normal sea-line had gone, and in its place there was a long, gradual hollowing out of the water, so that the extremity of the ocean that way had a curved shape. The righthand limit of this appearance was close to the wreck, yet the wreck itself stood upon a level line, and was still a most exquisitely distinct shape against the dark blue sky behind it. I did not suppose for an

instant that this was anything more than an atmospheric effect produced by the great heat acting upon the motionless air, and lighting my pipe (for the ladies had long ago fully licensed us in this matter), I sat talking with Miss Inglefield close against the foot of the mainmast, where we could catch a faint draught of air now and again from the swinging folds of the spanker. It was necessary to stand up to see the boats, and from time to time we'd do so, whilst occasionally I'd lean a telescope on my shoulder for Miss Inglefield to peer through; but the inducement to watch failed when the boats became mere specks on the sea, and then we kept our seats quietly conversing.

It might have been sheer egotism on my part, but an idea that had more than once visited me that this girl liked my company, I felt rather strongly again at this time when I noticed how her headache seemed to yield to my talk, and how the blue of her eyes brightened, and a trifle of colour came to her cheeks. A man's conceit is very apt to make blunders not a little degrading to his judgment; but I am pretty sure I was not wrong in thinking that this girl lighted up, so to speak, when alone with me: let fall a corner at least—if not more—of the veil of bashfulness she went clad in before others, and talked as if she had found some one she felt no timidity in prattling to. The ship was strangely quiet, and that perhaps made me feel Miss Agnes's companionship in a way that was novel to me; for the stillness was not the same thing we had found before on moonlit nights, or in dead calms, since Edwards, and the colonel and the others, whether on deck or below, were always a presence to disturb the seclusion of the darkest or quietest part of the quarter-deck; one *then* felt that the *Silver Sea* was alive with people; but now no less than seventeen souls were away; the only man visible was a seaman named Charles Nipper, who lounged yawningly at the wheel, disdaining even the mockery of holding the spokes; and the captain was below, and the few hands forward, making a holiday of the afternoon, had hidden themselves in the forecastle or in the shadow of the galley or the long boat out of the burning rays of the sun, and not a human note floated from any part of the vessel that, leaning tenderly with the swell, and imperceptibly revolving to the movement of the languid folds, whilst her canvas faintly shook its white cloths aloft, and a faint, gurgling sound would steal up from under the counter, might have well passed for an abandoned craft lying torpid upon that silver surface of blue, in whose depths the shadows of her tall masts trembled.

Well, I cannot clearly bring to mind what our talk was about—what presently happened, no doubt, drove it sheer out of my head; but I know that, coupled with that feeling of our being alone which I have mentioned, it was interesting enough to us both to cause us to forget all about the boats; and twenty minutes or more passed *in this way*, when the sight of old Pipes's head in the companion, *looking aloft and round for a moment or two before fairly stepping*

on deck, caused me to jump up, laying hold of the telescope as I did so, saying, "I suppose they'll be nearing the wreck by this time, Miss Inglefield. I wonder which boat will win?"

I gazed over the bulwarks, poising the glass ready to level it. "Hallo!" I exclaimed, "where have we been turning to *now*, I wonder? The wreck was abreast of us not long ago." I stared along the sea-line, carrying my eyes past our port quarter, then over our stern, then to our starboard quarter, and so on fair round the circle; but the wreck had vanished. When I glanced at Pipes again, he had come out of the companion, and with both hands squared at his brows, was looking with intensity into the south-east quarter. I approached him, and said in his ear, "She'll be in the blue thickness out yonder. I noticed it drawing up an hour—more than an hour—ago, but took it to be heat."

He dropped his hands and looked at me. "It's a fog coming along; it'll turn white presently, and I'm afraid—I'm afraid there's wind behind it."

"You have the bearings of the wreck?"

"Certainly; south-east by south three-quarters south. What'll they do? If Mr. Bird spies the smother, will he make for us? If so," he cried, with a convulsive dash for a glass that lay near, and levelling it as he talked, "why aren't he and the other heaving in sight? If he don't bear a hand, he'll go astray—why, look now!" he exclaimed in a subdued, hoarse voice, "d'ye see the stuff whitening out down in the north-east'ard there? My God! it's a regular smotherer rolling along!"

"Where's the wreck, Mr. Aubyn?" said Miss Inglefield, coming up to me and speaking with a troubled face and putting her hand on my arm in her childlike, clinging way.

"Out there," I replied, pointing; "there's just a little haze of heat betwixt us that obscures her; but we shall be seeing her presently."

I left her leaning over the bulwarks and joined Pipes, who had been speaking to the man at the wheel, and was now bowling about the deck in short circuits, and with an air full of anxiety.

"It'll be a regular sea-fog, Mr. Aubyn," he muttered, evidently wishful to sink his tone out of the girl's hearing; "d'ye notice how fast it grows and whitens east'ards? I've known strong winds to follow those appearances."

"The blue haze seems far advanced beyond the wreck," said I; "you may see that by the curve in the water. Perhaps the boats are in the thick of it, rowing with all their might. They may emerge at any moment. Have they a compass with them?"

"No, sir. There's the pity of it, Mr. Aubyn. Great Lord, what a mess to happen suddenly! Where were Mr. Bird's and Mr. Semple's eyes, damn them!" he cried in his excitement; "if *we* can see the thickness all this way off, couldn't they have seen it long ago, and returned? What'll they be doing? down in the

cabin of the vessel, I dare say, laughing or smoking; the men overhauling the wreck for findings, and the fellows in charge of the boats asleep, or seeing nothing owing to the hull standing between them and the weather. And, if Mr. Bird comes up and misses this ship and notices the fog, how will his seamanship advise him, eh? Will he shove off and take his chance of finding us by groping, reckoning on us being becalmed, and by so doing miss us, and maybe perish with the rest of 'em, or will he stick to the wreck, and trust to us beating up to her or heaving-to for clear weather? Damn them!" he repeated, bringing the glass away from his face and flinging it down and clenching his fist; "where are their eyes that they should have let such a job as *this* surprise them?"

All the time he spoke, the blue haze was advancing, dimming the sky higher and higher as it approached, whilst behind it the white vapour had lifted till it resembled an immensely long, low, snow-covered coast, with a good rise in the north-east, and shelving down into a mere filmy glittering tremble in the south. It seemed to be shoving the more transparent haze, the tremulous, azure mistiness, in advance of it, but one knew there must be wind behind to account for the rapid progress of the wondrous length of vapour which the white rays of the sun made so bright that the effect of it behind the haze and against the languishing blue was ghastly, though the sense of the peril of those on the wreck it gave to one no doubt helped to make it so. Miss Inglefield came and stood close to me, but without speaking a word. Now and then she'd raise her eyes to my face with a sort of imploring look in them, but there must have been that in mine which kept her silent. She must have felt that she could see with her own sight all that I could explain, and that the rest would be mere words.

Gradually, and yet with a certain subtle swiftness, too, the haze closed around us, and the brightness faded off the sea on the other side, and the horizon became a part of the blue dimness. The solid body of the white fog was now not above a mile off, and I peered through a telescope along the base of it till my eyes ached, but there was no sign of the boats. It was a wonderful sight to mark the vaporious mass that seemed to be about a mile high with a hornlike trend to the southwards of about half that altitude, sliding like a wall over the burnished, faint blue surface, with the swell heaving into it and disappearing as a slate vanishes when hove edgewise into a mound of snow, as though its opacity were actually solid, and held the wind that impelled it at bay behind. The sun's fiery mass stared with shorn beams through the haze, and its light upon the water was now a swimming, rusty lustre with a dirty appearance in the blue of the sea such as you may see in a well-used harbour. There were only three seamen left in the ship; one was at the wheel, and the other two, the Finn and Eye, *were on the forecastle, gazing at the approaching mist. Pipes put his head into the skylight, and roared to the steward and his mate*

to come on deck; and then said to me—"Mr. Aubyn, can you steer, sir?"

"It's many years since I grasped a wheel," I replied; "but I'll do my best, captain."

"Then for God's sake, Mr. Aubyn, go and relieve that man there," cried the poor old fellow. "Why, we have but six men to pull and haul, and of them three aren't sailors, and are useless aloft!"

I immediately went to the wheel, Miss Inglefield following me, and standing by my side full in the sunshine, that, spite of it sifting through the haze, had still a fierce fang. However, in a few minutes it would be blotted out by the fog. The man I had relieved was an able seaman named Nipper; he jumped forwards to help the others, to whom Pipes had roared out an order to brace the yards round to the fog that was coming down upon us on the port beam. The studding sail booms were out, but the studding-sails had been long before hauled down, and consequently there was nothing to do for the moment but to round in the braces and get the jib sheets over. The steward, his mate, and the cook helped, whilst Pipes flung the braces off the pins and let them go; repeatedly encouraging the fellows by crying out, "It's all right, my lads. We'll pick 'em up tidily enough. Two or three boards'll do it. This here thickness is a tropical smother that goes as fast as it comes. Haul, boys! So—well the top-gallant yard. Jump now and stand by the royal halliards till we see what's behind this whiteness."

As he spoke, the fog boiled up against the ship's side, and, in a breath, sea, sun, and sky vanished; the masts disappeared as though sawn off under the tops; past the foremast it was all white vapour, the forecastle clean hidden, and at the same moment one felt the wind, and saw the crystal, snow-like dust of the mist blowing along horizontally, and leaving the ship heeling to the draught of air, though without an inch of way upon her as yet.

"Let go the royal halliards fore and aft!" shouted Pipes. "Get the sails clewed up, my lads, and furled as fast as you can. Mr. Aubyn, how does the ship head?"

"South-west by south," I replied.

He came rolling up to the wheel and exclaimed, "She'll lie closer than that. Those lee braces want dragging upon." With wonderful activity for a man of his age, he seized hold of a little tackle called the "jigger," clapped it on to the lee main brace, meanwhile shouting to the cook and the stewards to lend him a hand. In this fashion the four of them managed to bring the yards well against the lee rigging, whilst the three seamen were aloft stowing the royals. As for me, though, as I had told Pipes, it was years and years since I had felt such a thing as the spoke of a wheel in my hands, yet I found no difficulty in luffing the ship till I had got the

weather leech of the main top-gallant sail shivering, and then letting her slide steady along with that tremble in the upper canvas. It was only at rare intervals I could see as high as that sail, when the fog would thin to a sudden rush of air, but, as often as it opened out, I found I was holding the vessel as she should go. But it was a bewildering, fearful time. It was not only the fog, that was like blinding a man, nor the freshening gusts of air—which every time they increased the heel of the ship, made one start to think of the fewness of the crew—there was always the haunting, distracting fear that the mates, on perceiving the fog rolling down, and dreading to lose us, had made haste to get away from the wreck, and had been overtaken by the vapour. It was terrible to reflect upon those boats losing the wreck, and losing us, too, rowing aimlessly about in this white blindness, with scarce a day's allowance of water amongst them, and nothing to eat, and the night coming on, for it was already long past three o'clock. "Great God!" I thought, "how easily a merry-hearted adventure becomes a dreadful tragedy!" I could scarcely bear to meet the glance of the girl standing beside me. I had seen her shiver when the vapour closed upon us, and when she looked into the dense, steam-like smother, deep in the heart of which her parents were, and our friends and the seamen, and I had marked the lustrous fear in her blue eyes melt into a swimming when she drew closer to my side by a step, and asked in a low, broken voice if I thought we should be able to find her father and mother and the Edwardses. I answered as cheerfully and heartily as I could, but I can tell you there is nothing in language to express the heart-subduing, ominous feeling excited by the freshening moans of the wind blowing out of the thickness across our decks, and the rippling and washing noise of water as the ship with sloping spars gathered way upon the smooth surface, and by the impenetrable vapour which made one think that the sun would never again shine, and the blue ocean never more show her bright bosom.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WE LOSE SIGHT OF THE WRECK.

OF all dense fogs I had never seen the like of the one that had come upon us. The glare of the tropical sun striking down into it whitened the vapour till it was like solid folds of foam blowing over us. Now and again a cable's length of flaw would give us a glimpse of the steel-like water flowing, as it might be, in a gully; or it would grow thin aloft to the trucks, and show the black royal yards up there with the canvas rolled up on them; but in a breath *whatever had been made visible in this way would be smothered up again, and past twenty or thirty feet of deck, and above the*

same height of mast, the eye would turn blind against the gleaming, bewildering, unsubstantial mass of speeding stuff.

It appeared to thicken with the freshening of the wind. Pipes came aft hurriedly, and took a look at the compass, and then sung out for the fore and mizzen-topgallant halliards to be let go, and the sails clewed up and furled. The men worked briskly; they were frightened by this strange and menacing thing that had fallen so suddenly upon us, and the Finn trotted with some alacrity up the mizzen shrouds, to hand the topgallantsail, which he was well able to manage alone, whilst Nipper and Eye climbed to the fore. I begged Miss Agnes to go below out of the damp of the fog, but she said no, she would rather remain by my side; the loneliness of the cabin would be terrible to her; so I asked Pipes to bring a chair to her, which he did, and then stationed himself to leeward of me, where our talk would not be audible to her.

"Sorry to keep you standing here, sir," he said, "but the cook and stewards arn't to be trusted at the helm, and I want the others to shorten sail whilst the wind keeps light."

"Do you expect more wind?"

"I do, Mr. Aubyn, from the circumstance of its beginning in this fashion."

"What's your scheme?"

"To make a two-mile board on this tack, then sail two mile on the starboard tack, and heave-to with a prayer to God that this muck'll pass before the darkness falls."

He pulled off his cap, and wiped his forehead with a glance at me full of dejection and anxiety.

"Captain Pipes, is there any chance of our losing sight of the wreck?" said Miss Inglefield in her low, delicate voice. "Do not fear to tell me the truth. I would rather know the worst."

"I'll speak the real truth, miss, and nothing but it," he replied, forcing heart into his tones. "Was the weather to clear at this moment, we'd see the wreck and our friends away out yonder, a mile or two off. So we know where they are, anyhow. We shall presently put the ship round and head for them, and wait, maybe, no further off than half a mile from 'em, for this stuff to blow away, and they'll come aboard, an' it'll be all right again. That's the truth, Miss Inglefield. Keep your spirits up; there's nothing to worry over yet."

She could have asked many questions, submitted abundant "ifs" and "supposes;" but she saw as well as I the anxiety in poor Pipes's face, and so contented herself with a sad smile of thanks for his answer, and held her peace. I admired this touch in her vastly, the more so, because her timid nature would have led me to suppose that in a sudden and grave trouble of this kind she would have shown herself full of terror, and distracted us by wild inquiries.

The men came down from aloft, and they and the "idlers" stood in a group near the mainmast waiting for the next order. The

wind had gathered weight enough now to heel the ship to the extent of a couple of strakes, and she was throwing out the foam to leeward handsomely, despite the way in which I held her jammed against the breeze. Yet this freshening did not produce the least sensible impression on the fog. It increased the velocity of the driving clouds of crystals, and it broke an opening here and there now and then ; but the stuff lay as thick on the sea as if it were a motionless body, and pressed round the vessel so closely that a biscuit thrown overboard would have vanished after it had left the hand a dozen feet. Pipes stood by my side waiting till we should have measured the distance he proposed to traverse.

"You steer well," he said approvingly. "'Tis a lucky job you know the use of the wheel. But what a mess to be in : what a mess on a sudden !" he ejaculated in a hoarse whisper, with a glance past me at Miss Inglefield.

"I only hope," said I, "they will have had the good sense to keep on board the wreck."

"Oh, they'll have done that—they'll have done that. There'd have been some signs of 'em had they quitted her afore the smother rolled down."

"But, suppose she should be sinking—draining in the water, captain—and her pumps disabled ?"

"For God's sake, Mr. Aubyn, don't let's suppose, sir. If that's her situation, she'll keep afloat till we've taken them off."

He went to the side, and looked over at the white water swirling past. Suddenly the wind dropped, failed utterly, and the ship swang to a level keel with a loud rattle of her sails against the masts that thundered down out of the blankness like an explosion of guns hidden in their own smoke.

"Let go the man-tor' gallant halliards !" roared Pipes. "Stand by the topsail halliards !"

Right ahead one heard a kind of dim, confused, rushing sound, like the seething of summer breakers on a shore striking the ear of a listener standing on the summit of a cliff.

"Hard up the helm, Mr. Aubyn ; hard up the helm, sir !" shouted Pipes.

I spun the wheel over as fast as I could ply the spokes ; but in a bound, a sudden strong rush of wind coming sheer over the bows, flattened the canvas hard aback, and blew the mist aft in smothering clouds, for all the world like bursts of steam from innumerable exploded boilers.

"Square away the after yards !" roared Pipes in his hurricane voice. "Keep your helm as you have it, Mr. Aubyn !" and in an instant he and the six men were springing about the decks letting go and hauling like madmen. The ship had good way upon her, and paid off rapidly with the spanker-sheet gone and the sail hurriedly brailled in and the after yards square. But this new and unexpected blast had an edge of real spite in it ; the ship as she

spun round heeled till you heard the water sobbing in the lee scupper-holes, and when the forebraces had been let go, and the head sails filled upon, why, she swept away like a racehorse through the thickness that was now taking a greyish tint, chased on her quarter by little waves with heads of hissing foam, like young serpents, nimbly coiling within the heave of a rope's end, out of the fog that stood upon the sea.

"Man the outer jib downhaul!" bawled Pipes. "Let the three seamen attend to that. Never mind about furling the sail yet. Cook—steward—clew up the main-topgallant sail; there are the clewlines made fast to that pin there! Let go the sheets first, you fools! Smartly now! How's her head, Mr. Aubyn?"

"West by south," I shouted.

I thought the poor old fellow would have dashed his cap to the deck from the sudden, wild, convulsive jerk he gave his arms. He rushed up to the binnacle, stared at it, and muttered as though he spoke with his teeth clenched, "Yes, everything's against us! Here we are flying from the wreck at ten miles an hour! and no hands to heave the ship to whilst the others are saving her spars!"

The strength of the wind had thinned the fog, and the sea lay exposed to about half a mile around, but the flying mist gave the running water a confused, blurred appearance; whilst beyond, it was still all a mere driving smother, but with the glistening whiteness gone out of it, hence I suspected that we should find clouds rolling overhead when it grew clear enough to see the sky. The breeze raised a sharp and shrill whistling and singing aloft, which was made almost confusing by the flapping of the topgallant sail swelling and thundering in the grip of the clewlines and buntlines, and by the slatting of the jib as it was hauled down, and by the pouring and seething of the foam which the ship's swift passage over the still smooth ocean, forced by the posture of her yards to hold her wind still well abaft the beam, was sending in white masses along her sides. Every fathom we now measured left the wreck farther astern, and this thought, one could see, put a sort of frenzy into poor old Pipes, who ran forward yelling to the men to bear a hand with the jib; but whether the fellows were wearied or growing sulky, they did not hurry themselves; and we had been bowling into the westwards at between eight and ten knots an hour for many minutes before Pipes was able to shout out to me to put the helm down.

How those few men contrived it I am sure I do not know. Engrossed as I was in watching the ship in order to steady the helm when she came to, I yet somehow made shift to notice what I have related, and likewise the sullen movement and behaviour of the Finn, which, added to the incapacity of the cook and the stewards, rendered that business of getting the vessel round a wonder to me. When the braces were belayed, two hands went on the jibboom

to stow the jib, and the cook, after a prolonged look, said he was willing to try his hand at helping Nipper to roll up the top-gallant sail. We were now close hauled on the starboard tack, our head to the north of east, and the ship, beginning to pitch a little to the seas which the weight of the wind had set running at her weather bow, crunched slowly through the water whose horizon was scarce of the diameter of a mile. There was a windy look about the thickness and the pale green of the surges snapping out from the base of the grey and darkening stuff and the hard pearl grey of what stood for the sky over our mastheads, that filled me with anxiety, though I tried to cheer myself up by reflecting that we were not in stormy latitudes, and that it was the mist and the confusion it made of the small, weltering circle of ocean that was visible to us which gave a foul-weather look to the picture.

All this while Miss Agnes remained seated close to the wheel, never addressing me, for fear, as I could pretty well guess, of taking my attention from my work. I'd turn and meet her sad, plaintive, anxious eyes now and again, and give her an encouraging smile; but I never looked at her without thinking of our absent friends, the dread they'd be feeling, the growing horror in them as they cast their glances from right to left into the mist, and witnessed no shadow to betoken our ship at hand. Oh, I tell you, it cut into one's heart to think of one's companions, of people one had lived familiarly with for weeks, of associates whose kindness and hospitality and the brightest side of their character only one could recall at such a time as that, in the fearful situation in which Mr. Edwards and his party and our seamen had been placed. If they were on the wreck, and I could not but suppose that Pipes was right in holding that the mates had stuck to the hull, it was no hard task to figure their dismayed faces, Mrs. Inglefield terror-stricken and giving herself up as lost, the colonel raging, Hornby half-stupefied with the suddenness of the thing, Edwards grasping his daughter's hand and striving to reassure her, and *she*—why, I'd feel my fingers stiffening into iron upon the spokes of the wheel as I thought of her, and saw in my mind's eyes her noble figure and her wonderful eyes borrowing a wilder light from their contrast with her white face as she glanced along the deck of the dismayed wreck, and noted the ruin and the litter which would give a fearful significance to the wash of every surge, to the moan of every gust of wind at a moment like that; and then with her brows shaded by her hand from the careering damp of the fog, sending her febrile glances into the thickness, first here, then there, to dry her eyes at last with a shudder and a spasm of the mouth as she'd tighten her hold of her father's hand.

Once I said to myself, "Would to God I were with her—to share her danger and help her to the extent possible to a man rendered determined and desperate in his resolution to preserve the life of a noble and precious and beautiful woman!" But turn-

ing and looking at Miss Inglefield, and meeting yet again the melancholy, sweet, appealing gaze of her girlish blue eyes, I felt conscience-stricken, and though Heaven knows I desire to extinguish all cheap, poetical sentiment out of this hard tale of disaster, I give you my word I exaggerate nothing when I say my heart went with a kind of yearning towards the lonely girl, sitting bravely silent, and watching me as though for a season I was the only friend she had in the world, and I was almost startled to feel that I was doing something within me, something unimagined within me, a wrong in desiring to be with Miss Edwards rather than with this gentle, patient, sad-eyed, pretty Agnes.

It was now half-past four o'clock. The wind was a strong breeze, and lying close up as she was, the *Silver Sea*, under whole topsails, foresail, spanker, two staysails, and the inner jib, was carrying all the canvas she needed. When the hands came down from aloft, Pipes sent the Finn to the wheel to relieve me, and told the cook to get the men's supper ready for them, and to furnish the cabin with any kind of dinner he could make out. He then walked to the binnacle, and took a long, long look in the direction where he might suppose the wreck lay, but there was nothing more to see than the clouds of haze which appeared a stationary mass on the near horizon, though one knew they were whirling along with the speed of the wind, and the seas swelling into sulky shapes, and rolling into foam, and seeming twice as big as they were because of the nearness of the misty circle they broke coiling out of.

"The fog seems to be thinning out a bit, don't you think, captain?" I exclaimed, as he stepped up to Miss Inglefield and me.

"Well, I can't say it does to my sight, sir," he replied.

"Are we steering for the wreck?" asked Miss Agnes, whose eyes had come to mine with a staring, startled look in them when Pipes made that answer.

"We are heading that way, miss," he answered. "We're not going for her as the crow flies, but we're so sailing as to bring the place where she's lying nearer and nearer, ready to sight her and lay to for the boats the instant the sea opens out a trifle."

She glanced at me as if seeking confirmation of this, and I nodded my head with a smile.

"Now, Miss Inglefield," said I, "this atmosphere is just a warm bath, and as wetting as one, and you've faced it long enough. Let me take you below. Do you know the curl is clean gone out of your feather, and your dress is so damp that Mrs. Inglefield will be angry with me for neglecting you when she comes on board and finds you wearing it."

And so saying, and telling Pipes to call me if he wanted any help I was capable of giving, I took her hand and led her down into the cabin. She went at once to her berth; but I stood some moments oppressed with an emotion that rendered my breathing short and

difficult when I gazed around me at the deserted interior. What had happened was more to be realized here than on deck, for you saw a dozen signs of the people, as if they were close by : a pipe-case, a novel lying open, a fan forgotten or thrown down in a hurry, a work-basket, a light overcoat. I tried to lighten my spirits by reflecting that we were still close to the wreck, that the weather might clear at any moment, that the whole party might be safely aboard again before sundown. It would not do ; my dejection was too strong ; there was a something, too, in the *feel* of the ship's increasing pitching, and in the growing heel of her, and in the sound of the stormy humming outside that made me fear we were going to have a taste of coarse weather, and no-seaman as I was, yet I was sailor enough to guess that if it should come on to blow, short-handed as we were, we should be carried clean out of all reckoning of the wreck, in which case our unhappy friends bade fair to starve to death if they were not drowned by the hull which could make no stand against a sea, and which, for all we could imagine, might be already half full of water.

I went into my cabin, and, opening a volume of sailing directions for the two Atlantic oceans, passed some time in considering what the two mates would be able to do should we miss the wreck. Ascension Island was a long way off, and it would be better worth their while to try for the Brazilian coast, though, to be sure, there was Fernando Noronha, where, should they be able to reach it, they might obtain help. But the boats were without sails or masts ; their stock of water was extremely slender, and they were without provisions. Would they find food and fresh water on the wreck ? But such speculations were half-maddening, and could do no good, and, tossing the volume into my bunk, I entered the saloon.

The steward was in a half-hearted way preparing the aftermost table for the meal which we were to call dinner. The ship was now leaning heavily from the wind, and beginning to plunge in earnest. Miss Inglefield was still in her cabin, and I went on deck and found Pipes standing near the wheel, the Finn at the helm. The two sailors were below getting their supper, and all forward the ship had a most deserted, melancholy appearance. The fog, speaking of it as the white folds which had closed round us, was gone, but the horizon was as thick as dirt, with a faint reddish tinge everywhere from the hidden sun, that gave the deep a forbidding aspect ; the sea had risen fast ; the surges were not yet indeed heavy, but they rolled in quick and strong processions, and the dark-green hollows were laced with foam, whilst the melting heads of them showed with a wild distinctness against the grey background, the bleakness of which to the eye was not to be *neutralized by the warmth of the wind*. The sky was plain to us, *but there was not a streak of blue in it ; the drift-like haze over the sea-line seemed to be flying aloft too, and it was all ash-colour*

up there, a wide and dreary expanse, with a deepening of hue in places, as though the form of a cloud, more sombre than the rest, were glooming through the cheerless, monotonous, faintly red-tinged dimness.

"Do you see any signs of the wreck, captain?" I asked, noticing a bitter, anxious expression in his honest, square face, as he turned to me.

"Not a vestige, Mr. Aubyn. How is it likely? the fog's blown away, but the weather's come on as thick as ever I saw it in a January gale in the English Channel. We must 'bout ship again in twenty minutes," he exclaimed, pulling out his watch; "and after a short leg we'd better heave-to, I fancy," looking at me with an air of uncertainty that was melancholy assurance of a deeply troubled mind. "What'll Mr. Hornby think? what'll they all think? that we've left 'em to their fate?"

"No, Pipes; no, man; the mates are with them to explain, even if they are unable to judge for themselves."

"Ay, but they'll be saying why did Pipes let us leave the ship? how was it he couldn't tell that there was a thickness coming along with a strong breeze of wind behind it? How? I can't answer. 'Twas all blueness and calmness to my eyes, Mr. Aubyn, with a promise of lasting, too," he continued in a broken voice; "and the glass was as steady as a ship high and dry ashore."

"Come, come," said I, "we'll be having them with us again before long."

He answered with a dreary glance to windward.

"You think it better to heave-to than working away in the direction of the wreck?"

"Ay, but where is she? Single bearings are no good after you've been dodging about; and in such weather as this, a mile wrong may end in fifty. Do you observe how the wind strengthens? and see our leeway, sir. The chop brought the wind dead on end. No, no, another leg and then we'll heave-to. She's bound to be in sight if it was clear; but this here scraping and mucking about may end in our going to wind'ard of her, and ratching out of sight of her astarn under the impression she's ahead somewhere."

One could see it was settling down into a fair, steady blow, with a thick horizon, and a threat of drift in the long, tossing plunges of the surges. The wind was pretty well in the right quarter for the south-east Trade; but it was not *that*, whatever else the breeze might prove, as was plain enough from the gusty character of it, and the dirty look of the sky, that, with the reddish tinge of sunset fading out of it, was getting to wear a sort of dingy brown, like the smoke from a long, smouldering wick. It never rains but it pours; and bad as it was that our friends should be adrift and helpless in the hull of a wreck in mid-Atlantic, the matter was made ten times worse than need be by the sudden shift of weather, this change from cloudless skies and an ocean like melted tin, to a strong wind

and pouring green combers and a fogged sea-board, with a promise of a black night waiting to rise up out of the east. Pipes was resolved to heave the ship to, and I have often considered since that there was nothing else he could have done. The old fellow stood gripping a weather backstay with his square, dismal face staring into the wind's eye, where we reckoned the wreck to be, whilst I alongside of him would glance from his moving lips to the greyness upon which his gaze rested, and back to our heeling ship rudely thrusting her bow into the green slants running at her and flinging foaming shreds of them over the rail, where you'd see them flash like a flight of mackerel athwart the forecastle, with often a clean whisk overboard under the foot of the foresail.

"Now, Mr. Aubyn, if you don't mind relieving the Finn at the wheel?" said Pipes. And when that was done, and the seamen and steward and cook ready on deck, I put the helm down, and after a bit the *Silver Sea* was on the port tack again, and the men clewing up all the topsails, for I heard the skipper tell them that he meant to heave-to under nothing but the lee clew of the lower main topsail, for he had no notion of making an inch more of drifting than he could help. There was enough work to keep the men aloft for a long spell. The cook assisted, and the steward went on to the foretopsail yard; but his German mate turned white when Pipes sang out to him to jump aloft; he skulked away behind the pumps, and I believe would not have got into the rigging even with a pistol at his head. Could the fellow have steered, I'd have helped the men on the yards with pleasure, for I had not forgotten how to pass a gasket, and the pressure of a foot-rope would have been no new sensation to my boots. Nor could Pipes relieve me at the helm, as somebody was wanted on deck to attend to the demands the men would sing down; so that before the last bit of canvas had been rolled up the night had come along dark as the inside of a sack, the breeze had freshened into a strong wind, and all that could be seen was the heads of surges melting into pale fire as they broke.

It was not until the binnacle lamp had been lighted, and my place taken by the ordinary seaman named Eye, that I remembered how two or three hours before the steward had been ordered to get a meal ready for us in the cabin; and the thought of this brought Miss Inglefield into my head. The cabin was pitch dark. I ran up the companion ladder, and bawled for the German steward, and on his arriving I ordered him to light the cabin lamps at once, asking him what he meant by loafing about on deck when he very well knew that there was a young lady below who might be needing his services there; and, in short, I gave him a hearty wiggling, for I had been extremely disgusted by his slinking and cowardly behaviour when Pipes had asked him to jump aloft, and, between ourselves, I may add Germans are a people I never had any great love for. I waited whilst the fellow went in search of a box of lucifer

matches, and I may tell you that the darkness and the straining and groaning of the invisible interior gave an edge to my thoughts of the people upon the wreck, away out on the desolate sea, that was as bad as thinking of them as drowned. After a bit the German lighted one of the lamps, and the first thing I saw by it was Miss Agnes seated right aft against the rudder trunk. I went to her hastily. She was dressed as if ready to go on deck, and, though she changed her posture when she saw me, her first attitude was full of a sort of wild, listening expectancy to which her glistening eyes that looked dark enough under the brim of her hat and from the contrast of her death-like white face, gave a theatrical character. She smiled, and then broke into a half-sobbing laugh as she stood up with her hand extended, crying, "Oh, I am so glad you have come!"

"But why have you remained below, alone in the darkness here? why did you not join me on deck?" I exclaimed, holding her little hand for the mere comfort I felt my grasp would give her.

"You wished me to go below, and I was afraid if I went on deck you would think me in the way," she answered. She withdrew her hand and came round the table to my side and asked me if the wreck were in sight.

"Why, no," said I. "It is now night-time, you know, and it is too dark to see the wreck even were she close to us. But she is not far off, and it is Captain Pipes's intention to lie-to until day-break, when we shall be able to see her. Hark! do you hear that?" I exclaimed, as a faint report that produced a blue glare, which had shone dully for a breath upon the skylight glass, reached our ears. "It's the first of the rockets Pipes, I expect, means to keep firing at intervals during the night to let our friends know we are wide-awake, and on the look-out for them."

This was but small comfort to offer the poor girl; but what more had I to give? She shivered and glanced at the cabin lamps, and then along the lonesome, heaving interior, and said something in so low a voice that I had to bend my ear close to her mouth to hear her.

"They will have to remain in the wreck all night?"

"Yes," I replied.

"How will they manage? Will they find shelter?"

"Oh, there is sure to be shelter," said I. "The vessel was what sailors call light, and, therefore, even if she had a little water in her hold, her cabins would be dry; and though, to be sure, they'll miss their beds here, and the comforts of the *Silver Sea*, yet for one night, you know—it'll be a sharp but not a dangerous experience, giving us enough to talk about till we reach home."

The steward had by this time placed some cold meat on the table, which, with a cup of tea, was to furnish us with a meal in lieu of the ordinary dinner. I had as little appetite as Miss Agnes;

but we took our seats nevertheless, and presently Pipes came below quietly, and sat down, looking pale and worried to death.

"I have left Nipper to keep a look-out," said he; "though the ship wants but little tending;" and I noticed his eyes take a scared expression as he ran them along the cabin, as though he, like myself, better realized what had happened below than on deck.

"You'll continue firing rockets all night, captain?" said I.

"All night, sir, at regular intervals. There's a good pile of them left."

"Will they see the lights from the wreck?" asked Miss Inglefield.

"No doubt of it, miss, no doubt of it," he replied, heartening his voice. "What should hinder them? They're not fur off. It'll keep their spirits up; and, you know, miss, there are sailors enough among them to explain to the ladies and gentlemen why it is we don't sail close and take 'em off, dark though it be. They'll do, they'll do," he continued, talking at her with his square, jaded face turned to me. "This time to-morrow, please God, we'll all be weary of recounting this here adventure. It's a bit of a trial to them as well as to us whilst it lasts. But Lord love ye! the sea's made up of circumstances after this here pattern, eh, Mr. Aubyn? It 'ud be reckoned more of what I might call a gallivanting lark than anything else by sailors, you know; though, of course, those who are not seafaring persons amongst them out there," with a toss of his head to windward, "might naturally wish for more pleasant diversions."

But talk as he would, and talk as I would, one could see that the sense of the quiet, timid girl, pierced through our forced easiness, and struck deep into the anxiety that lay behind. I'd never glance at her without fancying from the way she would cast her gaze up at the skylight, and her eager listening to every gust of wind booming as it swept past the companion, and her manner of starting to every deeper note echoed into the heart of the ship by a wilder plunge than usual, or a stormier rush of seething waters under the quarter, that she knew the posture of matters as thoroughly as we ourselves did. Yet she'd give us a wistful smile of thanks now and then for anything reassuring we said; and I see her now, making pretend to eat and drink, looking first at me and then at Pipes from under her hat, with eyes so sad it was wonderful the trouble in them did not melt into tears; and I also see that cabin with a shadow in it the lamps could not lighten, its emptiness accentuated by the three of us sitting at a table that had heretofore been well-filled, and I hear the creaking and straining in the empty berths, the crying of the wind sweeping between the masts, the showering of spray forward, the throb of the rudder in its trunk, and the grinding of the wheel-chains suddenly wrung by the swoop of the stern into a hollow.

How was it going to end, I thought? Here was a stormy night set in, the wreck God knows where already, for our drift was bound

to be two feet to her one, many hours of darkness before us, and nothing to be done but keep the ship hove-to under a shred of canvas for the want of hands to work her. How was it going to end? If the dawn broke and showed us no sign of the wreck, it was a thousand to one that we had lost her for good and all: for we might sweep the sea, and pass within a few miles of her, and yet miss her, whilst a calm would leave us helpless: and what then would be the fate of those on board of her, if their rescue should be delayed by some passing vessel? For who was to know in what condition the wreck was, and what provisions and water were in her, if any there were at all, for the maintenance of the fifteen souls who now formed that maimed and mastless and abandoned fabric's company?

CHAPTER XXIX.

A BURNING SEA.

PIPES speedily despatched his cup of tea and plate of beef, and rose to leave the table. He went into his berth for a few minutes, and on his reappearing I asked him how he meant to manage about the watches.

"Oh," he answered, "I shall be up and about all night in case of a shift of wind, and on the look-out for anything good that may happen."

"Well," said I, "there's no need for you to exhaust yourself, you know. I'll gladly stand watch and watch with you, and will guarantee to keep as keen a weather eye lifting as you could want."

He thanked me, but said he would not ask me to do that. All he'd require would be that I should stand by ready for a call to take the wheel if a chance should come to head the ship in the direction of the wreck. "As for me, Mr. Aubyn," he exclaimed, pulling his fur cap over his head, and eyeing me dismally, "there'll be no going below to-night. What should I do below? sleep? Lor' bless you! it 'ud need a long spell of wakefulness, sir: a week, ay, and a fortnight of it, I reckon, for me to be able to close my eyes with the thoughts of the ladies and gentlemen and my men tossing about aboard that cussed wreck away out in the blackness to wind'ard. Mr. Aubyn, I'll leave you to cheer up Miss Inglefield. Can't tell how it is, I'm sure; but when I meet her inquiring young eyes, all the hearty and encouraging things I'd like to say to her just come up as high as here," pointing to the bone in his throat that stood out like an apple, as though it was the lump of words he meant, "and stick fast there." And so saying he went up the companion ladder.

I returned to Miss Inglefield, and sitting down by her side, fell to talking to her as cheerfully as I could, whilst the steward cleared the table. I felt it would be idle to endeavour to draw her thoughts

away from her father and mother ; so I related several tales of the sea that came into my head, stories of miraculous escapes, astounding adventures, all of which bore good reference to the situation our friends were in, and the morals of which were that we had no right to feel extremely uneasy about them, seeing how scores of men and women had come safely through perils of a character as dreadful and as apparently hopeless as could be imagined. She listened to me with such childlike earnestness of attention that there was never anything more winning and moving in its way. Quite still she sat with her hands clasped on the table, and her soft eyes on my face, and her expression varying to my talk, with a little frown of wonder and dismay over the tragical parts, and then a faint, tender smile brightening upon her parted lips when I came to the dark night going and the glorious sun rising and revealing help close at hand. But whenever I paused, you saw how uppermost her trouble lay by the looks she threw around the cabin, and the manner she steadied her under-lip with her teeth, as though every fresh glance at the rows of berths, every washing sound from the wild and yearning waters outside, every straining heave of the deck under us were a new perception of what had befallen her.

Oh, I never felt sorrier for human being than I did for her that night ; it was a fearful loneliness to come upon her timid heart suddenly ; whatever I might think of her parents, they were her mother and father any way ; and for her to reflect upon them helpless, unprotected, without shelter or food or drink as she might fear, on board a crazy wreck rolling amid the turbulent darkness, was very nearly as bad as thinking of them as drowned. Why, only a few hours before it was a calm and shining day ; the wreck was a gentle, placid picture in the south-east quarter ; between rolled the glass-smooth sea gleaming like satin, and blue as the sky it reflected ; our decks were full of busy figures, the men eager for the race, Edwards and Hornby for the diversion, Miss Edwards going stately and beautiful over the gangway, Mrs. Inglefield, gay in hat and colours, meant to fascinate the afterwards-gazing eyes of the rowers, and the colonel nervous, irritable, but determined ; and now the spirit of the deep with a wave of its magical wand, had changed pleasure into tragedy ; you had but to feel the pitching and rolling of our ship, and to listen to the shrill and stormy crying of the wind to know it ; and to close your eyes to image the weary labouring wreck with the golden spray breaking over her littered and mastless decks, and to behold our friends and seamen crowded in some part of her as completely shipwrecked in their way, and dependent upon God's help for their lives, as if they had formed the company the vessel had originally started on her voyage with.

When I rose to go on deck, Miss Agnes asked if she might accompany me.

"Certainly," I replied ; " but you'll find it dark and windy ; there is nothing to be seen."

"But I shall have you to talk to," said she; "it is lonely and miserable in this cabin."

Without further words, I put her hand under my arm and we went on deck. It was about nine o'clock. A large, globular white lamp was burning at the mizzen peak, and a similar lamp swung on the forestay. I had noticed when the darkness first came along that there was a plentiful light of phosphorus in the water; but the radiance since then had become a wonder; I never could have imagined the like of such a thing; the ocean was just an expanse of swelling and weltering liquid fire, of a dullish yellow in the troughs, but full of bright sparkles of a greenish gold in the arches and crests which where in swift motion, and rushed into flaming foam as they coiled over like wheels and broke. When the ship rose to the height of some radiant surge, one seemed to see the deep dimming into a faintness of phosphoric lustre as it went away, heaving in pale yellow hills against the blackness of the sky at the horizon, where the shadow of the night was unexpressibly deepened into a very ring of ink by contrast with the irradiated billows. Flakes of fire flew over the vessel's fore-castle with every plunge. As the water recoiled from the swooping and shearing bows, it was like looking into the mouth of a live volcano to peer over the side and mark the sudden mass of wild and fearful splendour swinging up the oncoming folds like burning oil, with a thousand clear and flashing gyrations of the luminous stuff diving deep, like corkscrews, under the shining and seething surface, and marvellous configurations shooting out from the ship's side as though they were spirits of fire glancing and sporting amid this hellish but most sublime scene: things not shapeless indeed, yet of forms indeterminable by human sight and sense, and for that reason in weird and terrible keeping with the burning ocean, whose acclivities filled the sweeping wind with dismal echoes, and sounds of warring and trampling and hissing. Yet bright as the sea was, no light came off it; the sky lay like jet low down upon it; the outline of the ship was plain indeed, and you'd see the shape of the hove-to and tossing fabric with startling distinctness whenever a heavier plunge than usual flashed up the water all around her; but her decks were in deep darkness, and not the least glimpse could be caught of her masts and yards, unless it were the faint, glimmering pallor of the piece of angular canvas she was lying-to under, and the extreme end of the weather fore-yardarm and the boom-iron upon it, thrown out by the radiance of a composant that was shining blue and brightly there when, with Miss Inglefield on my arm, I gained the deck.

I might have used the sea for fifty years, and yet have found the sight it presented this night something to have turned me stock still, to have subdued and awed, ay, and almost paralyzed the will *within me, as though some new fiat had been delivered by the Almighty, and I was beholding a dread and thrilling and hair-*
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stirring change in the aspect of the familiar world. I felt the girl's hand tighten upon my arm, and for many moments she stood staring without speaking.

"What is that strange light up there?" she said, meaning the fiery exhalation at the fore-yardarm.

"It is what sailors call a composant," I replied; "they say it is electricity attracted by the iron on masts and yards—a kind of marine will-o'-the-wisp which no gale of wind can blow out."

"What a sickly, ghastly light!" she cried. "It's more frightful than the burning sea. I wish it would go!"

She had scarce spoken when the composant disappeared, but in a few seconds it or a similar exhalation was sparkling at the lee fore-yardarm, where one saw it swaying and floating like a bubble on a pipestem, but looking wilder and more malignant than when to windward, because every roll of the ship dipped it towards the yellow, shining waters which by contrast gave a peculiar clearness to its unearthly hue. It was something to send a shudder through a girl built of tougher fibre than entered into Agnes Inglefield's composition. Why, though I perfectly well knew what the gleaming object was, the sight of it for a minute or two set all my superstitious instincts a-bristling, as though, faith! I was some knee-quivering yokel goggling a corpse-light from behind a tombstone. But, to tell the truth, one did not want that pale, unholy-looking lustre burning in the air and sliding about the yardarm, as though some spirit-hand were struggling to attach a ghostly and frightful lantern to the dodging and mowing and sweeping spar: I say one did not want *that* to add to the unearthly appearance of the sea rolling in folds of unilluminating light under a pitch-black sky, along whose ebony ceiling the wind was sweeping in confused noises, which our invisible rigging reverberated in notes so wailing, shrill, and mournful that one could have sworn there were hundreds of women and children hidden somewhere in the overhead darkness, weeping and sobbing and shrieking in distraction.

After a little the composant vanished, and, with Miss Agnes still holding tightly to my arm, I crossed the deck to windward, where, against the throbbing gleaming of the weather sea, I had discerned the figure of Captain Pipes. It was blowing a fresh breeze, enough, had all been well with us, to show a top-gallant sail to. It came warm as a woman's breath, and the heat in it might have made you think that the sea was on fire indeed, and that the breeze took its fever from the flames.

"The ocean is a wonderful sight, captain," said I. "Did you ever see it so bright as this before?"

"Once only, sir. It was off Porto Rico. The sea was a sheet of flame, Mr. Aubyn. It made one marvel it didn't burn our vessel up."

"Did you notice the composant just now?"

"Yes, sir; there were four of them all shining at once not long ago. The air's full of electricity."

I stared awhile to windward and then said, "If the wreck be this side the horizon one should think we ought to be able to see her upon yonder shining surface."

"No, no," answered Pipes hoarsely; "this is just the sort of light to hide her. It's all confusion and playing and deception with the eyesight. Rub phosphorus on the wall of your sitting-room; ye'll see the green stuff creeping and crawling in a sort of smoky gleaming, but it'll not show ye the pattern of the paper under it. It's the same with this here sea. If the wreck was only a mile off I shouldn't expect to see her."

"In what part will it be, Captain Pipes?" asked Miss Agnes.

"Why, near as I can make out, Miss, by careful reckoning, she'll be right dead to wind'ard—yonder," said he, pointing out upon the weather bow.

The girl let go my arm and went to the rail and there stood looking into the wind. Whenever the ship rolled, her figure would be thrown out like a drawing in ink upon the pale, burning, yellow ground. I watched her a moment or two till my eye went to the forecandle, where the spume was blowing in chips of gold. It was strange to see the lamp on the forestay swinging, while the rope it hung by and the rigging about it were invisible.

"Do you expect to find the wreck in sight at dawn?" I asked Pipes in a low voice.

"No, sir; I have not the least hope of it," he replied. "But I'm not going to say we shan't pick her up to-morrow. What I'm praying for is that Mr. Bird, thinking we're lost sight of for good, mayn't take it into his head to rig up a jury mast and get sail on the hull and shove her out of the *spear* of my calculations. If he's fool enough to do that we shall lose them as certainly as that they're adrift now; and if that's to happen, Mr. Aubyn, then smash my eyes," he exclaimed, suddenly clenching his teeth, "if I can tell what's the next thing to be done."

"We must endeavour to carry the ship to some near port," said I.

"Ay, but how long are you going to give us to make sure we *have* lost 'em?" he cried with a passion in his voice that was very new in him indeed. "If we don't sight 'em to-morrow we can't give up, you know; nor yet the day after, nor the day after that—and where are you going to stop? We're bound to go on beaving about till we find the wreck, Mr. Aubyn; and until we come across her or arrive at the settled conclusion that she's gone down, there'll be no use in talking of shifting our helm for a near port."

The old man's irritability was so great that I dropped the subject for fear that I should increase his agitation. Finding me silent he stepped aft, and presently fired another rocket. The brilliant and hissing projectile seemed to rive the blackness that rested upon our mastsheads into a mile-deep, blue-tinted chasm, and scarcely had the sparks of it settled away to leeward in a glimmering pro-

cession undulating like a serpent towards the smooth, yellow, phosphoric backs of the seas that way when a composant of unusual brilliance gleamed out upon the weather main-topgallant yardarm.

"See," said I to Miss Agnes, "how old ocean helps us. As if she suspected that Pipes's rockets would not suffice to let our friends know our whereabouts, she hangs up shining signals of her own."

"Oh," cried the girl, looking up, "it is another of those ghastly lights ! They make me afraid, Mr. Aubyn. They are so shockingly unearthly. I would not mind if they were real fire ; but they do not burn, and the wind cannot extinguish them."

"Come, come," said I, "you must pluck up heart. You have too much spirit to be alarmed by a marine jack-o'-lantern."

"It's one thing following another," she exclaimed, with a tremor in her voice as if she would cry. "This sea would be beautiful to watch were my parents safe and our friends with us ; but it's horrible to look at now, and then the pitch black sky, and those dreadful, mysterious lights——" She stopped and crept close to me, on which I took her hand and put it under my arm, pressing it gently as I held it there to steady the trembling of it.

The Finn was at the wheel ; I knew him by his big figure that was plainly marked against the luminous waters astern as the ship rose and fell ; Pipes stood like a statue in the weather quarter ; and I could catch a glimpse of two men walking in the weather gangway. But in spite of these living details the black fabric of the vessel plunging her bows into the liquid fire, and tossing from time to time radiant storms of it over her head, had a lonely, wild, deserted air. A chill came down into my heart out of the luminous, uncanny jewel hung by the wind on the topgallant yardarm, and out of the dim, wing-like phantasm of canvas stretched between the lower topsail and main yards, and out of the scraping, and groaning, and twanging, and screeching orchestra up among the blotted-out rigging. Father of Mercy ! how quickly a thing grows serious in this world ! It was the thought of the pleasure-makers adrift in a wreck some miles out yonder upon this lightning-coloured, rolling ocean that gave the *Silver Sea* the grim loneliness, the gloomy, stricken, helpless look I found in the heaving and surging hull as I stood watching her ebony fore-castle striking down and hewing out the yellow billows into brighter flames, and accompanying the dreary crashing and washing noises of the seas alongside with the hellish minstrelsy that rang down from her sweeping, naked spars.

For the life of me, however, I could not forbear a secret laugh when I thought of the colonel and little Hornby. Recollecting how *nervous* the military man was over mere trifles, it was not very *difficult* for me to conceive what the state of his mind would be *when he looked forth upon this ghostly, gleaming ocean and*

thought how before the morning dawned he might be lying fathoms deep among these fiery waves. One might readily suppose that he would not spare his friends. By this time his roaring must be over, it is true ; but for how many hours had he been shouting out that he considered Hornby their murderer for having proposed the excursion to the wreck ; that he always knew some fearful calamity would overwhelm them, and that it had come now ; and that there was nothing more to do but tie their pocket-handkerchiefs over their eyes, and cast themselves down upon the deck of the hull and wait for the sea to drown them ? And in what language would poor Hornby endeavour to console and encourage Miss Edwards ? In my mind's eye I saw the little shipowner quivering and flitting about on his sparrow-like legs, urging his companions not to give way, but to keep a bright look-out for the *Silver Sea*, that was certain to heave in sight before long ; calling upon Mr. Bird to resolve the wild light of the deep into a mere commonplace condition of the tropical ocean that he might neutralize the depressing superstitious fancies it was bound to inspire, and so forth. I had no doubt that the little chap would behave with spirit. But God knows there was not much of humour, after all, in my imagination about our friends. The real, heavy tragedy of the circumstance of that day broke like a thunderclap upon me when I stared into the dim, glimmering distance, marked by the sooty band that defined the yellowish sea-line beneath it with a startling pouring of gleaming surges brightening as they advanced till they broke and roared with what might have passed for living flames against the weather bow of the ship, and realized the idea of that dismasted and helpless hulk rolling amid the phosphoric brightness, and of the crowd on board of her crouched on her staggering deck feeling already, for all one could tell, the pangs of thirst and of hunger, and gazing with eyes, in which even now the wasting fires of fear and despair might be found burning, across the pale and flaming ocean into the distant inky blackness that was to blot out our ship and all chance of other rescue for many bitter, long hours still. How would Margaret Edwards bear it ? What would be the effect of this tremendous experience upon the mother of the girl whose hand was trembling under my arm ? The wildest part of all contemplation concerning them was not so much whether we should find the wreck in sight at dawn, whether we should be able to discover her should she not be in sight then, as whether she would outlive the night ; for who was to know what water she was making, in what condition the storm that had wrecked the fabric had left her, what appliances in her were serviceable for keeping her afloat ?

But natural as such thoughts were, there was no purpose to be served by encouraging them ; so I broke away from them by talking to Miss Inglefield, for there was plenty of other things to converse about fortunately—I mean the wonderful appearance of the sea, the dense blackness of the heavens which, but for the

luminousness of the ocean, would have shown forms of flying clouds and the driving of scud over rifts and patches of dim, dark, starless sky, the ghostly blue-lights kindling at the yardarms out of the wind, the strange, unfamiliar look of the ship tossing like a shape of jet upon the greenish gold of the waters, with nothing to be seen aloft but the faint glimmer of the foot of the canvas waving there like the spectral pinion of some vast form whose outline it might be possible to discern by intent inspection of the black air. As to Pipes, he was not safe to talk to yet ; I knew the worry in his head had made a bear of the poor old fellow, and that for the present it was best to leave him alone right aft there abreast of the wheel ; so I moved about with Miss Agnes, carrying her to leeward at times to look at the brilliance washing away from the ship's side when she'd crush the foam out of an underrunning sea ; for to leeward along the bends was the place to see the phosphorus as the shadow of the vessel added a deeper tinge to the gloom, and it was a perpetual convulsion and tumultuous play of fibres, and serpents, and lances, and arrows of fire darting up from under our keel on the shining slant of every sea whose crest ran melting into an almost lightning brightness from our leaning and rolling hull.

No bells were kept, and by-and-by, drawing to the companion for the light in it, I found by my watch that it was ten o'clock. I was about to tell Miss Inglefield the hour, and ask her permission to conduct her below, when she suddenly cried, "What is that, Mr. Aubyn?"

"What do you see?" I exclaimed, startled by the vehemence in her voice as if she were terror-stricken.

"Look past that boat there," she cried, pointing to leeward.

I stared in the direction indicated by her shadowy arm, and just abaft the quarter-boat she meant, that was hanging in the davits, I saw a pale pillar of fire standing up on the sea and reaching to the height of several degrees above the horizon. It was as much like the stalk of a flower in shape as anything I can imagine to liken it to, with a slender spreading out of its summit, in which luminous cup or circumference there seemed to my eyes to be resting a volume of blackness, of so deep and intense a nature that it hung as plain against the dark heavens as a blot of ink on a sheet of chocolate-coloured paper. As I gazed, a flash of violet lightning fell zig-zag to the sea from the black mass, quickly followed by a rumble of thunder coming up like the moaning toll of a huge, deep-throated bell against the wind.

Some one was passing us apparently to relieve the wheel. "What is that column of light down there to leeward?" I asked.

"A waterspout," was the answer.

"Of course it is," I exclaimed to Miss Inglefield. "It's a whirlwind holding a pillar of this phosphorescent water in its transparent walls. Was there ever a more magnificent sight? I have heard of waterspouts illuminated by lightning ; but think of a shaft

of fire moving along the deep, with its head veiled in a thunder-cloud ! I hope it'll go clear of us, though. A waterspout's a dangerous machine to run foul of. Captain Pipes," I sung out, "do you see that spout to leeward there?"

"Yes, Mr. Aubyn, I see it, sir," he answered gruffly. "It's not coming our way. There's no call to be alarmed."

As he spoke, a second sharp glare of lightning threw up the huge folds of vapour eddying and coiling at the summit of the fiery pillar, like the first belching of smoke from a newly-fed factory furnace, and up through the wind came a short, sharp explosion of thunder like the detonation of a heavy piece of ordnance.

"Upon my word," said I to Miss Inglefield, "this is a real night of miracles. What with burning seas, fiery exhalations, and flaming columns supporting a ceiling of thunderstorms, and all that sort of thing, don't you know, as Hornby would say, I protest I feel with the 'Ancient Mariner' that we are the first that ever burst into another world."

"It is dreadfully terrifying," exclaimed my poor little companion.

"No, don't say that. It's wonderfully sublime. Unfortunately, we are not in a position to enjoy it. How such a sight as that illuminated spout would fascinate Miss Edwards ! Can she and the others see it, I wonder ? I dare say ; and if so, we shall have many notes to compare to-morrow."

She made no answer ; indeed she could find no hope in my talk ; and we stood in silence watching the wild and beautiful and startling appearance to leeward. How far distant it was I could not say ; I strained my ear, but I could catch no sound of the commotion of boiling water ; I noticed that Pipes barely glanced at it. I could see him plain against the phosphoric lustre when the ship rolled to windward and brought the radiant waters visible above the rail ; and he stood steadfastly staring into the sea over the weather bow, apparently heeding nothing but the thoughts of the wreck which he imagined lying out there. The thin, shining column of water went gliding slowly down upon our lee quarter, with now and again a streak of crooked red or blue lancing out of the mass of inky vapour on top of it, and after a little it either broke and fell, or was swallowed up by the ocean's glare. Miss Agnes put her hand over her forehead and took a long, long look at the pale, weltering brightness to windward.

"Oh !" she cried, with a sobbing sigh, "if we could but see the wreck, how happy I should feel."

I answered that we had every right to hope that she would be in sight when the day dawned ; and that even if she were not then to be seen, we were almost sure to run into her view before sundown.

I also pointed out that, whatever our fears might forebode, the truth might be that our friends would make themselves comfortable on board the hull, and feel perfectly secure until we should heave

sight ; that there was a good chance of their finding water and provisions on board, since it was not to be supposed that the crew belonging to the vessel, in abandoning her, would be able to carry off all that was eatable and drinkable aboard her ; also that we had no reason to believe that the wreck was in a sinking condition, since she was pretty high out of water when she hove in view, and that, for all we could tell, she might have been days and even weeks washing about in that condition. I talked thus to hearten up my pretty, timid, lonely little companion, and fit her to pass a night of dismal solitude in her cabin ; and when I had her below in the lamplight, where I could see her face, I noticed how willing she was to receive all the comfort she could from me by the gentle smile in her eyes, and her look of gratitude, which were clearly meant to please me by leaving me to suppose she took my view of the melancholy case of her parents and our friends. There was a sweetness in this that touched me closely ; also was there something to move me not a little in her reluctance, as it were, to leave me, in her manner of lingering and saying good-night again and yet again, following it by a pause to listen, or to steal a kind of shuddering glance around the deserted cabin, or by some short exclamation leading to more words from me, so as presently to render it necessary to say good-night once more.

At last she entered her berth and closed the door, and pulling out a cigar, I lighted it and sat down at the table for a smoke and a spell of thinking. I don't know that I ever felt more depressed. It was not so much due to the thought of the danger our friends were in, or of our own peril, indeed, seeing how fearfully undermanned we now were, as to a sense of foreboding that weighed upon me. I struggled to shake the feeling off by asking myself what I feared ; but it would not do ; the cabin was full of hollow, plaintive sounds ; it was more like a vault than the interior of a ship in its suggestions of loss and suffering ; and then when I thought of the deck, why, the image of the glittering sea and the glimmering yardarm corpse-lights and that fiery stalk of water, with lightning-charged and sooty vapour for petals, rose up and put enough superstition into my imagination, in spite of me, to render an unconquerable thing of the gloom that pressed down upon my spirits. How would Edwards contrast the spray-swept, staggering hull he was on with his luxurious home in Harley Street ! Even still I would smile when I thought of the colonel's fears and shouts, and pictured Hornby's figure and bright, alarmed eyes. But Mrs. Inglefield ? she was not made of the stuff to endure the hardships and anguish of a shipwreck ; and when I recalled Miss Edwards with her noble, majestic form and beautiful face, and imagined her sleepless and spirit-broken aboard that accursed wreck, dreading the worst, and realizing it too with the intensity of *her ardent and unsparing imagination*, I found myself stamping *the deck with a kind of mad impatience*, and looking around me in

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half-crazy quest of some idea that might enable us to succour her and the rest of them even ere the distracting blackness of the sky and the unearthly shining of the sea should melt under the eye of the morning.

I went on deck to speak to Pipes before lying down. There was no decrease of brightness in the phosphorescent rolling. For leagues and leagues the ocean was throbbing in sheets of flame, but the wind was failing somewhat, and the *Silver Sea* plunged upon the subsiding surges like a ship at anchor. I took a peep at the binnacle, and found that the breeze had not shifted by a quarter of a point. Pipes stood in his old place on the weather quarter as erect and stiff as a sentry. I went up to him and said, "I have taken Miss Inglefield below; she has gone to her cabin. I have done my best to cheer her up, but this fiery water and the composants and the waterspout have upset what pluck she was tbefore showing, as well they might, for they are cursed arrangements to run foul of such a job as we've fallen upon."

"Not more cust than the job itself," replied the old man, speaking less gruffly, though there was plenty of irritability in his hoarse voice. "What's there to trouble about in phosphorus, as common in the sea as compreesants are in the air, and as formiliar to seamen as waterspouts? She'd better think of her parents; that's where my thoughts are. Blast my limbs if the idea of five of my passengers, my two mates, and ten of my men being adrift in a wreck there out of my reach, isn't enough to send me raving mad."

My never having heard Pipes give vent to an oath before, made this speech extremely impressive; he also struck his leg heavily with the flat of his hand, producing a loud noise by so doing, and hissed out the word as though he had set his teeth.

"We shall recover them to-morrow," said I, quietly.

"How do you know?" he cried, fiercely rounding upon me.

"Well, we must hope it," I replied, not at all liking his manner, but determined not to be affronted by him.

"Hope!" he muttered in thick, sarcastic accents. "Hope! what sort of navigator is *he*, I wonder? And what's the course he's going to lay down for the wreck? Will hoping tell us how she bears? Will it keep her free of water if the pumps are disabled, and she's started a half-dozen of butt-ends? Will it find those seventeen souls in drink and grub? Don't talk of hope to me, Mr. Aubyn;" and turning from me, he overhung the rail and stood grumbling there to himself.

I should have been sorry to discover the old fellow in liquor; but it would have been more satisfactory to me to have found him stupidly drunk than talking as he now talked without so much as a drop of spirits in him to account for his manner and words. It looked as if bitter anxiety and annoyance and fear of the consequences of this wretched business had sprung some spar in his intellectual equipment, and that he was a wee bit off his mind; or

else it was a wild fit of irritability not governable by him, and causing him to talk as if he had lost his balance. For my part, I was too much worried by his behaviour, which threatened further difficulties, to be angry with him, though I can tell you his rudeness was extremely offensive to me, more especially when I contrasted it with the square, hearty smiles, and bland and polite behaviour he favoured me with when Hornby and the others were aboard.

"Well, Captain Pipes," said I, "before I leave you I want to repeat that I am quite at your service, and willing to help you in any way I can. As I told you before, I'll stand watch and watch with pleasure, and call you——"

"I mean to keep the deck all night, sir. If the breeze shifts, I'll rouse you out to take the wheel, whilst the others make sail," he answered, sullenly.

On this I turned on my heel and went below.

CHAPTER XXX.

WE SEEK THE WRECK.

I TURNED into my bunk fully dressed, and lay awake for about an hour thinking of our friends upon the wreck ; wondering how long Pipes would go on beating about for them if the hull was not in sight next day ; what would become of them, and what would be their chances of saving their lives if we failed to find them ; and how in that case *we* were to manage, seeing that we were some hundreds of miles distant from the nearest port, and that there were only three men among us capable of doing sailor's work aboard this ship of seven hundred tons. I was also extremely troubled by Pipes's manner which, on consideration, I felt sure was not owing to any intentional rudeness, and which, therefore, was the more bothersome to think of because it implied a condition of mind that might prove not a little perilous should our quest for our friends prove vain, and anxiety and grief, in consequence, eat more deeply into his brains. Before I fell asleep I heard the old fellow sing out an order, and from the shouts on deck I gathered that they were sheeting home the weather clew of the lower maintopsail and setting the foretopmast staysail. Who the hands were who did this I could not tell, as I was ignorant whether Pipes had ordered the six men—I mean the two stewards, the cook, and the three sailors—to remain on deck all night, or whether he had divided them into watches. The peculiar rolling of the ship was *good proof that the breeze was fast moderating, and it was easy to tell that the sea was gradually calming, too, by the flat and splashing falls of water to windward.* The rudder jerked rudely in its

trunk, the bulkheads strained noisily, and there was a dreary clatter of crockery in the pantry.

In the midst of these sounds I fell asleep, and was slumbering soundly when I was awakened by the German under-steward, who informed me that the wind had shifted, and that the captain wanted me to take the wheel whilst the others made sail. I instantly sprang out of my bunk, pulled on my cap and went on deck. The clock in the cabin showed the time to be a quarter past four. It was extremely dark, but the sky had cleared, and a few smoke-like clouds floated almost motionlessly among the stars which shone with wonderful brightness, many of them in blues and greens; and here and there a planet sparkled like a little moon. The sea was a black surface now, rolling in a light swell, with dim green sheets of fire in places among the folds gleaming fitfully as though they were the reflection of lightning; but all the amazing yellow splendour that had been visible when I went below was gone, though how phosphorescent the sea still was might have been judged by a glance over the taffrail, where every mild sinking of the counter flung a veil of light over the black eddies there, with small rushings of brightness beyond the main glare like streaks of wind shooting out in advance of a line of breeze overrunning a dead calm.

There was a gentle draught of air blowing out of the north-west, but so soft that when the ship leaned away from it on the side of a swell you ceased to feel it. Pipes saw me emerge from the companion and called out at once, "The air's come fair for a course for the wreck. Take the wheel at once, will you, Mr. Aubyn, that Nipper may jump aloft and help the others?"

Being on deck all night had not sweetened his voice; it was still very rough and hoarse and harsh; and he could not have addressed me more peremptorily had I been one of the crew. However, paying no heed to this, I stepped aft to the wheel and took hold of the spokes, Nipper giving me the course, which I very well remember was south-east by east half east: for it seems they had swung the topsail yard when the draught of air had come along, though it was wonderful that the vessel should have got the barely perceptible steerage way she had out of the few cloths exposed to the faint breathing.

The instant I was at the wheel, Pipes ran forward and began to sing out with all his might and to pull and haul. I could hear him abusing the under-steward, and sending his voice in a roar aloft to the men there to bear a hand and loose the sails and "lay down;" but it was too dark to see anything; it was just before the dawn, the blackest hour, and even could I have used my sight it would have been puzzled by the haze of the binnacle-lamp coming off the compass-card.

By-and-by one heard the rattling of chain sheets sweeping over sheaves, the sound of hanks and lacing mounting the stays, the creak of halliard blocks and the dull scraping of parrals rising up

the masts, with the soft beating of canvas and the whipping of reef-points. There were seven men in all, for Pipes lent a hand in dragging; and amongst them, and before long, too, they managed to set the foresail, three topsails and fore and main top-gallant sails, besides some fore and aft canvas, though there was very little singing, the Finn just now and again breaking out into a short yelp, whilst Pipes roared himself husky with such shouts as "Haul, boys!" "Up she goes!" "Altogether, my lads!" "Sweat it out of her, men!" and the like.

The dawn broke over the port bow. The first slow filtering and sifting of the dim, indescribable light sent a thrill through me that was like an electric shock, so wild was the eagerness in me to descry the wreck, so powerful the mingled hopes and fears which took possession of me. The horizon stood in a coal-black line against the greenish tinge, and the stars in the east languished and died, whilst in the west they flashed bright and thick as at midnight among the few slow clouds. But we were in latitudes where the morning leaps sparkling in a bound upon the night: though whilst the dawn was yet breaking I can never forget the chill and melancholy of that ocean picture. The sea looked like a flat, circular table of ebony with an horizon exaggerated into infinite remoteness by the sharp, clear, indigo sweep of the eastern line against the paling heavens, and by the rest of the circle dimming westwards into the sky to where the low-lying stars resembled silver coins resting their nether limbs upon the water. Pipes came and stood near the wheel, and motionlessly looked at the ocean over the port bow and ahead under his hands, with which he shaded his eyes. Every splash of the water alongside fell cold upon the senses: in the very flapping of the sails one seemed to hear a kind of shiver running through the ship as the green dimness changed into ashen grey, and the sad, bleak light hovered over the black mantle of the deep; but the pause was short; in a few moments a silver haze came draining out of the east and brightening as it swept like a mist up the sky; the horizon there became like a mirror seen in a dim atmosphere, but anon it resembled ice with a flow of crystal water bubbling and twisting out of it; then suddenly a delicate pink uprose, the heavens beyond grew blue, and even as the rosi-ness was changed into shining gold, the arch of the sun jutted up, striking a long and level ray of exceeding glory right athwart the ocean under the waving of which golden and most beautiful wand sea and heaven took a noble tropical blue, the clouds were transformed into fleecy bodies with prismatic tints upon their swelling shoulders, and the new day shone in splendour around us, with a shaft of splendid light striking fair from the risen sun to the very bow of our ship, whose decks gathered a score of radiances, and whose topmost ropes resembled golden wire, and whose greased masts looked like spars veined with flames under the pouring of *the hot and cloudless luminary.*

I had a keen eye : long ere this my gaze had explored the sea-line, and I knew that there was nothing in sight—at least from the deck. I watched Pipes groping with his eyes from one bow to another, and from cathead to amidships. The old fellow's face had an ashen, haggard look. It was full of trouble, and there was a sort of excited working about the mouth, the kind of movement you will see in the lips of a man who exerts his strength in dragging upon a rope or in lowering a weight from a height. I thought I would let him have a good look before addressing him. He went to the companion for the glass there, and bringing it to a backstay, steadied and worked away with it for five minutes, again and again sweeping the horizon from right abeam to well abaft the lee bow with a long stare between, clean into the heart of the eastern dazzle, where the brightness would make the water-line confusing ; then seeing nothing, in a passion he closed the tubes with a force that came very near to breaking them, and looked at me.

"Nothing in sight, as you feared, then?" said I.

"Not from here," he replied with his eyes gleaming with irritability, and polishing the big lens of the glass with the corner of his coat.

"But the wreck may be visible from aloft though," said I. And I was about to offer to go aloft if he would call a hand to the wheel, when he thrust the glass into his pocket, and getting on to a hen-coop, clambered awkwardly into the mizzen rigging. He swung himself pretty nimbly over the top, and when there searched the horizon afresh, telling me to port the helm for a minute that he might see well into the east and south ; he then went as high as the crosstrees and peered again, and eventually shinned on to the royal yard ; but the sea was manifestly bare, and after he had been aloft for about a quarter of an hour, he came slowly down, and when on deck sung out for the fore- and main-royals to be loosed and set.

"It's no more than we expected," said I, as he thrust his haggard, square face into the binnacle to see if I had brought the ship to her course again. "You never hoped to sight the wreck this morning?"

"I'm sure I don't know *what* I hoped," he exclaimed, pulling off his cap and mopping the sweat off his forehead. "It's enough for me to understand that of all the fearfulest troubles that could come upon an old man like me, this is out and away the worst that could have happened. So help me the Lord!" he shouted, looking at me wildly, "I'd rather that the *Silver Sea* had gone to the bottom, taking all hands with her, than that seventeen people under my charge, folks for whose safety I'm responsible, should be knocking about dying of hunger and thirst in a wreck. It would be honourable enough to be lost in a gale or by springing a leak ; but *what's going to be said when it's known that I consented to seventeen people under my charge, nearly all my passengers, nearly all my*

crew, and both of my mates boarding a wreck, then that I was blown away from 'em, then that I lost them, then that I gave up seeking 'em, and sailed away for some near port, eh? what's going to be said? But," cried he with a great oath, smiting his open hand with his clenched fist, "there'll be no sailing away till we've found 'em, living or dead. The very rats must give up afore I do, and every rope turn green as grass, and every sail wear thin as a blowing of tobacco-smoke before I quit this bit of ocean without getting tidings of 'em, good or bad."

I eyed the poor old fellow steadily, thinking it almost impossible that such a business as this, which we had no conceivable right as yet to take a gloomy view of, could have turned him crazy; yet quite at a loss, if his mind were not unhinged, to know what to attribute his passion, and strong and strange language, and wild resolutions to. He stared at me sternly in return, as if he thought I would object to his resolve to convert the *Silver Sea* into a *Flying Dutchman*; but I was in no mood to argue; I felt that he ought to be able to understand our situation and the chances we had for recovering our friends and the seamen more fully than I; and that if he took the worst and most dismal view of the circumstances, it was owing to a mood no words of mine were likely to make an impression upon, at all events, just then.

Yet it was not pleasant, I can tell you, to look at his wild, pale, worried and angry face, and hear him vociferate his intention to go on sailing about until he found the wreck or got news of her. This might do very well for a few days, providing the weather remained fine; but suppose the hull should sink whilst we were seeking her, and force the people into their boats? *They* might be rescued; but what were *we* going to find? And yet Pipes apparently meant to keep us hanging about this sea until we encountered that which had ceased to exist, or obtain news of that of which no report could survive!

I looked away from him, on which he turned on his heel and walked forward to attend to the setting of the royals. He shouted to the ordinary seaman who was in the foretopmast crosstrees, "Do you see anything of the wreck up there?"

"Nothing, sir."

He stamped violently on deck, as though the disappointment had been unexpected; then ordered the men to sheet home and get the yards hoisted; and when this was done he sent Eye to relieve me at the wheel, and told the cook to get breakfast.

It was a true tropical morning that had broken over us. The breeze was so faint that even the light canvas hung up and down to it; yet delicate as it was the ship acknowledged its impulse; and the clear, dark blue water under her bows was broken into wrinkles, which flashed back the glory of the sun in silver, by the *metalled forefoot* of the beautiful clipper. A gentle swell was the *sole survival* of last night's strong wind. The east was a haze of

white glory with an ocean of quicksilver under it, deepening out into exquisite blue, till astern of us it lay a rich violet under the heavens. Young as the sun was, there was already a sharp bite in his radiance, and so sluggish were the folds of air, and so wave-like the equatorial heat that came swimming down out of the resplendent quarter over our bow, that one saw at times our flying jibboom revolving in it like a corkscrew; every sail loomed out twice as big, with a kind of writhing of the yardarms and a sort of silvery glitter down the bolt-ropes, and a bluish dazzle under every arched foot, as though the white canvas and black spars were set flat upon a huge mirror reflecting some wondrous brilliance astern, with margin enough of glass to edge the sails with a thread of splendour.

Since nothing was to be seen from aloft, I knew it would be mere idleness to keep watching for the wreck for a long while yet at the rate we were now sailing, so I went below to freshen myself up with a wash and a change of linen after my night in "all standing;" and when, after about half an hour, I was leaving my berth I met Miss Agnes in the act of quitting her cabin, dressed to go on deck. She looked pale, and I was pretty sure had slept but little; her blue eyes were dim, but they brightened with a smile as I approached, and she clasped my hand with a kind of eagerness as if it did her good to have me near her. This was too plain for me to miss seeing, though I was not such a coxcomb as to mistake its real import. Why, it is almost impossible to realize the loneliness that must have weighed upon that girl's spirits all night. If you are a woman, put yourself in her place, and think of being suddenly sundered from your parents and friends in mid-Atlantic, and add to that all the fears their situation would suggest to you, and what you would suppose when you looked along the row of empty berths, and reflected upon your own solitude, and conjectured what would be the end of the dreadful adventure.

"Is the wreck in sight, Mr. Aubyn?" she at once said to me.

"Not yet," I replied.

Her lips tightened a moment, and her eyes opened with a look of fear. "Not in sight!" she cried.

"We did not expect to find her in sight," said I. "We were a long distance from her when the night fell, and as we presented a much larger surface to the wind than she did, our drift, as sailors say, would be two or three times greater than hers. But we have now a fair breeze, and are steering as true for our friends as Pipes's calculations will enable him to head; and we have every right to hope, therefore, that in a few hours' time—for we are sailing very slow just now—we shall have the wreck fair in view."

"I pray so, I pray so, indeed," she exclaimed, with tears in her voice; "for what will become of my parents, Mr. Aubyn, what will become of *them all*, if we do not rescue them?"

"Don't let us speculate in that direction, Miss Inglefield, till

we're quite sure they're not to be rescued," I replied. "Anticipation of trouble is the cause of more grief in this world than trouble itself, because life is fuller of imagination than fact. Pray how did you sleep last night?"

"Not very well," she answered, with a languid smile. "I missed Margaret Edwards, and felt very lonely. Every sound was full of melancholy, too; it was my fancy, of course, but the noise of the water outside seemed like a constant sobbing, and the wind made one long wail as if there was nothing but misery under the sky."

"Well, there's a glorious morning on deck, anyhow," said I, noticing the ease with which she now addressed me compared with her former timidity and diffidence; and struck by the spirit of her language, which was very unlike the childish things she would say in her mother's presence. "How long will it be before breakfast is ready, steward?" I called to the man who, in a very jaded and listless manner, was laying the table-cloth.

"Half an hour sir," he answered, smothering a yawn and wiping his eyes.

We went up the companion steps, and in a few minutes the mild and balmy breathing flowing over the taffrail, and the broad, white, magnificent sunshine, and the freshness rising off the beautiful blue of the deep, seemed to brighten the girl up as a flower is when placed in water. She said good-morning to Captain Pipes; he touched his cap to her, but with a singularly uneasy look, as if he feared she was going to question him; and putting an air of bustle into his manner, as though to stave her off, first going to the compass, then staring aloft and around, stepping about as he did so, he said to me, "Are you going to remain on deck, Mr. Aubyn?"

"Till breakfast time," I replied, "and as much longer as you please."

"Then perhaps you won't mind just keeping a look-out while I go below and clean myself up a bit; keep her straight as she heads, my lad," he said to the man who was steering, and forthwith swung himself down the companion.

"How pale and ill Captain Pipes looks!" exclaimed Miss Agnes. "And how husky his voice is!"

"He has been up all night!" said I.

"But that should not make him seem so worn. It is not much for a sailor to remain on deck all night."

"No," said I, "but you must add the trouble he is in at losing five of his passengers and nearly all his crew."

"Why should he feel so much trouble as to make him look ill if he hopes and believes, as you do, Mr. Aubyn, that we shall sight the wreck by-and-by and take all the people off it?" said she quickly, with a frightened expression in the glance she gave me, and *then following on* with a yearning look at the blank ocean line.

"Well, I suppose he feels that nothing is certain at sea," I

answered ; "and that being so, it's not unreasonable, perhaps, that he should feel worried, and look so too, until the wreck heaves in sight, when of course his face will clear."

She made no reply to this, and stood glancing along the decks as though noticing the deserted appearance of the ship, then lifted her soft blue eyes to the sails, and slipped her little hand into my arm unconsciously, just as she might take her mother's hand, evidently startled by some thought that had come to her ; and drawing me gently to the bulwarks, she asked me in what part of the sea I expected the wreck to appear.

"Yonder," I replied, pointing to the right of the sun's flashing wake ; "I presume so, at least, by the direction in which Pipes is steering the ship ; one may be sure he has kept her bearings and his reckonings pretty steadily in mind ; though its a hundred pities the wreck hasn't a spar standing, for every foot of height means a good increase in the diameter of the horizon, and the difference between a dismasted hull and a vessel fully rigged may be the difference between seven and eighteen or twenty miles if the weather is bright. However, I for one mean to keep my weather eye lifting, as nautical men say ; after breakfast I shall take the liberty of climbing on to that yard there," pointing to the fore-royal, "and I shall go on repeating the ascent until we sight the wreck, or until darkness renders any further look-out useless."

As I spoke my eye happened to light on the Finn who was standing in the galley door smoking a pipe and staring our way. The moment he saw I noticed him he put his pipe in his pocket and came right up to me.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said he, tipping his cap on to the back of his head, whilst he smeared over his forehead with the back of his bare arm ; "do you know vot the cap'n indendsh to do ?"

"Yes," I replied ; "he intends to cruise about this bit of water till he recovers our people."

"Ay, dot vill be all very vell vid a shtarn vind ; but if it come to rotching, who'she to verk the ship ? us dree seamen ish pretty near knocked up already ;" said he, looking with a certain freedom of manner, I thought, at Miss Inglefield, and with an undertone of mutiny, if, indeed, it were not mere insolence, in his speech, that was rendered not a little impressive by his small, extraordinary countenance and huge, lubbersome, swaggering figure. "Dere's a shight of sail to be made on dis hooker for dree men, plenty of ropes to pull, lady, and shelp me Gott, de shtewards and de cook are of no more use dan dot pump dere."

"The captain is the proper person to talk to on this subject," said I coldly ; and I walked aft with Miss Agnes, whilst the Finn stopped in some speech he was beginning and returned to the galley.

"What did he say, Mr. Aubyn ?" exclaimed the girl in a low voice, with a peep behind her. "I could hardly follow his meaning."

"I do not expect to see her yet," she exclaimed with a tremble in her voice ; "I was thinking more of what their sufferings will be on board of her in this great heat, if they are without water."

"They took water with them in the boats," said I ; "not much, indeed, but enough perhaps, with careful husbandry, to suffice them until we rescue them—that is, supposing they find no fresh water in the hull ; but we ought not to infer the worst."

Yet it was a natural thought to come to her. It had come to me, I know, as I had stood looking from her into the blue, hot, writhing and flashing distance on which her eyes were fixed. One need not be thirsty one's self to understand what anguish there is in thirst, when one is in the tropics, close to the equator, and when one is thinking about that hideous form of suffering under a burning sun and aboard a ship whose decks are like the iron of a hot oven, but against whose sides the bitter briny water tinkles with a rippling, refreshing sound that has worked, and will again and again work, madness in the brain of men and women agape for the smallest drop of sweet drink to cool the horrible fire in their throats, and to cleanse the bloody froth from their baked and broken lips. As my glance went from the girl's upturned, wistful face to the blue, hot, silken sea, the image of Margaret Edwards rose with startling vividness before my mind's vision ; I beheld her noble and beautiful eyes glazed, her face of a leprous white, the sweat of suffering in gouts upon her forehead ; and this was followed by a full picture of all those people helpless on board that wreck, crouching in all the sullenness of misery apart from one another, sending their dim glances in anguish across the deep, the hot sun boiling down upon them by day, and the dews and chill of the darkness keeping them shuddering throughout the night, no help coming, the hours passing into days—why, it was a waking nightmare ! it sent shiver upon shiver through me, and as much to appease the wild, feverish restlessness that suddenly seized me, as to break away from the alarmed, questioning look with which Miss Agnes was regarding me, I ran to the companion, thrust the glass into my pocket, and hastily walking forward, slung myself into the fore shrouds—though I had hardly put my foot upon the first ratline when I felt I was bound on a useless, baking journey.

However, since I was in the rigging, I made up my mind to mount it, but I would go no higher than the topsail yard, for there was no Jacob's ladder, and there was nothing to be gained by my cleaning the hot tar off the topgallant shrouds on to my thin serge trousers. I got on the yard, and steadying myself I pointed the glass and ran it slowly along the sea-line, covering a range from port to starboard of about sixteen points. All that was visible was a faint tinge of smoke a little to the north of east, just this side of *the sun's reflection*. It was so thin and dim that it was better to *be seen with the naked eye than with the glass*. It flashed upon *me that it might be a smoke made by the people aboard the wreck*

as a signal, and calling to the cook and Nipper who were standing in the shadow of the galley, I asked if Captain Pipes were on deck yet, for the maintopsail hid the quarter-deck from me. Nipper answered he was not, and sung out eagerly, "D'ye ye see the wreck, sir?" I said, "No; tell the captain I want to speak to him."

In a few moments the old fellow came rushing forwards and hailed me wildly, not doubting, I suppose, that I had sighted the hull as I was steadily and silently gazing through the telescope in one direction, namely, at the smoke. "What is it, Mr. Aubyn? what do you want?" he roared.

"I can see smoke away out yonder," I answered, "a little abaft the line of the cathead."

"Is it a steamer's smoke, d'ye think?" he bawled.

"It's impossible to say," I replied, noticing how my voice was re-echoed in a sort of floating way among the sails as I sent my words to the deck with one hand to my mouth. "It's the merest film—just a smudge. I thought it best to let you know of it, for it might be a signal made aboard the wreck."

"How do you say it bears?" he cried.

"Why," I shouted, "as nearly as I can tell, between one and two points abaft the line of the port cathead."

He sung out to the helmsman for the ship's exact course at that moment: the reply came dully flowing aloft to me in indistinguishable accents; and Pipes roared out: "It'll be a steamer's smoke, sir. You're not going to make me all those points out of my reckoning. If the wreck's afloat she's ahead of us—nowhere else! But since you're aloft, Mr. Aubyn, keep your eye on the smoke, will you, sir, and let me know if it draws one way or the other, and what becomes of it." And so speaking, the old chap retreated aft and I lost sight of him.

Though I was no higher than the topsail yard, I nevertheless commanded a great elevation above the water's edge, and all around me the ocean sloped away into a wonderful distance. There was a glassy look in places where the air was dead or a current was sneaking along; and north and west there was a silvery glint on the extreme horizon that hung with as delicate a gleam as a streak of moonlight against the pale blue of the heavens. Here and there the shadows of the seemingly motionless clouds touched the azure surface with brownish patches that might have passed for shoals. I carefully searched the sea-line as far round as the ship's canvas would permit me, but nothing blurred the mighty continuity of the ocean cincture but the wan thread of smoke this side the sun's flashing wake. Sublime as the vast expanse of deep was, its desolateness was the feature that struck and impressed me most, associating it as I did with the idea of the mastless hull afloat and idle in the midst of the tremendous solitude of waters with the pale and hopeless faces of our friends and our seamen staring for any sign of help over her broken bulwarks

The sails on the mainmast shone out in a white and stony glare against the sky, and the dark blue beyond swam betwixt their curves, and the black yardarms gleamed as if coated with oil as they went trembling out into the heated folds of sapphire air. It might have been a dead calm for any motion of wind that I could feel. Yet the ship was softly sailing with a slow swinging in and out of her canvas as she lightly curtsied upon the swell. It was pleasant to hear the quick chafing of rope against rope, the faint creaking from below, the rasp of a sheave on its pin, the tapping of reef-points, the caressing utterance of white cloths sliding along stays. The ripples broke in threads of silver from the stem, and now and again in the blue mirror under the jibbooms I would spy a phantasm of white jibs gleaming out of the lucent profound whenever a deeper curtesy than usual hove the bows of the ship closer to the followed water. Heaven knows how many leagues it was possible for me to see then : I know it was a mighty stretch of water I commanded through an atmosphere as clear as polished plate-glass ; and that the wreck was not in sight from the altitude I was perched on meant either that our drift during the night must have been exceedingly great or else that she had foundered.

Meanwhile from time to time I watched the smoke, and after awhile I found that it was drawing slowly to the northwards, fining down gradually, until it died out a point or so forward of our beam. This proved beyond question that it came from a steamer ; and my mind being now satisfied, I descended the rigging after taking another careful look at the sea ahead and on both bows.

"You were quite right, captain," said I, as I gained the quarter-deck. "The smoke was a steamer's. It has faded out a little to the east of north."

"Of course it was ; the wreck don't lie where you sighted the smoke," he answered, stopping in a short, irritable stumping to and fro to say the words with his hands behind his back and his fingers fiddling at one another like a girl's dissecting a skein of silk, and then resuming his walk.

"Well," I called out to him peevishly, for the climb had tired me, and I was burning hot besides, "I hope you're right in your calculations, Captain Pipes. It's a good sign to find you so cocksure, certainly ; but though I don't know how many miles a man should be able to see in clear weather from your upper foretopsail yard there, let me tell you that there's view enough to be got to make the bare horizon an infernal disappointment, if so be that your reckoning's right and that you *are* actually heading dead for the hull."

He had stopped again to listen to me, and then approached me by several rolling, half-savage steps. "Look here, Mr. Aubyn," he roared ; "I'm captain of this ship, sir. Don't you come any of Colonel Inglefield's game of bullying and sneering at me, for I'll not stand it. Ye may know the difference 'twixt port and starboard ;

and I don't doubt you reckon yourself a smart sailor ; but you're not going to teach me my duty, nor have your laugh out at me either, sir. Understand that. I know my powers, and how far I've a right to go, and how far Mr. Hornby 'ud back me in going ; and seeing the mess we're now in, s'elp me the Lord, Mr. Aubyn, if you try any of your 'longshore jokes upon me, with your sneers and your observations upon the width of the horizon, I'll put ye under lock and key, I will ; I'll floor ye as sure as my name's Moses Pipes. So now you know what to expect."

His face was as red as an ensign ; his little eyes literally blazed in their sockets. He stood for a moment or two with his arms tightly folded upon his heaving chest, staring at me furiously ; then letting fall his hands he swung himself round and renewed his irritable patrolling of the deck, while the ordinary seaman at the wheel, who had put on a broad grin, fell as grave as an owl as he looked up at the sails and gave the spokes a twirl. For my part, I was rendered speechless by astonishment. I felt no anger, nothing but profound amazement that the hearty, cheerful Pipes of the whole of our voyage so far down to yesterday ; the agreeable, smiling old fellow, whose salt, sympathetic face it was a pleasure to watch, whose plain, homely language was always full of rough but genial courtesy, should have addressed me in the insulting words he had used. Well, thought I, as my eye went away from him to the broad, glaring sea, hang me if this isn't a very agreeable interlude indeed in our trip in search of pleasure and health ! It's not enough that seventeen of our people should be drifting about and slowly frying aboard a wreck : our captain must needs fall crazy and threaten to lock me up ; whilst our ship with square yards rolls softly along to God knows where, manned by six men, of whom three would be as useless as greengrocers in an emergency, not to mention two of them being, in my opinion, as full of mutiny as a cocoanut is full of milk !

Putting the glass down upon the skylight, I laid hold of a camp-stool, and carrying it to Miss Inglefield, sat down close to her in the line of the mizzenmast's shadow. She looked bewildered and terrified, and after glancing past the mast to make sure that Pipes was not too near to hear her, she said in a low voice, "What have you been doing to annoy the captain, Mr. Aubyn ? *What* is the matter with him that he can address you so furiously and insultingly ?"

"It's either a case of sunstroke," I replied, smiling to reassure her, and pulling out a cigar to help her into believing that the air of indifference I put on was perfectly sincere, "or else the grief and worry the old chap feels at having sanctioned the race yesterday, acting upon a very inflammable nature, are proving too much for his good sense."

"*But how unlike his former behaviour, Mr. Aubyn !*" she exclaimed, with a sudden indignation putting an unusual fire into her

pretty, pensive eyes. "It seems inconceivable that he should speak to you in such a manner unless he is *really* crazy."

I laughed aloud at this, and saw the old fellow turn swiftly and stare at me ; but I took no notice of him.

"You have been so obliging, too, steering and pulling ropes, and offering to remain on deck whilst he went to bed. Oh, he *must* have fallen silly quite suddenly," she added, with another timid peep at him ; "though I hope not, for what *shall* we do if he goes out of his mind ?"

"No fear of that," said I. "The truth is, he has got too *much* mind. He thinks too much. He keeps his brains simmering with wild and heated fancies. That must be it. He hasn't the least doubt we shall have our friends aboard before the sun sets."

"Does he think so really ?"

"Why, certainly. He says he is steering straight for the wreck, and if that's so she is bound to heave in view before long. But as I was saying, he's been thinking all last night and all this morning over the rating Hornby will give him for allowing himself to be blown away from the wreck ; and as he's an old sea-captain, with not a halfpenny saved, I dare say, and dependent on Hornby's good will for a living, he's allowed his imagination to upset his good sense, and suffered a savage and unreasonable mood to enter him and stop there. He's of a naturally excitable temperament, you know. Do you remember the night we lost a man, when the boat we sent away to see what the black object that passed us was, remained a long while out of sight ? How he shouted and fretted, and nearly stunned us by discharging a gun ? and how he hopped on and off the rail ? Oh, he's a very excitable man, and this business now has fairly capsized the poor old chap."

She listened, accepting all I said. It was the best construction I could think of to put upon what I could not myself understand ; though I may as well say here that my own belief then was that Pipes's mind had lost its balance from the deep anxiety that quite consistently oppressed him as master of the *Silver Sea*, and as the person answerable for the lives of all on board, hard as I found it to reconcile in the faintest degree the idea of craziness—to give it no graver name—with the plain, prosaic, homely, and simple-hearted old seaman who had navigated us from Plymouth Sound to the latitudes we were now groping about in.

"But," said I, thinking aloud, "he'll recover himself when the people are safe aboard again off the wreck. I shall have him apologizing to me for his rudeness ; so it is certainly best not to appear to be even conscious of the change in him now."

"Do you think he is really steering in the direction of the wreck ?" she asked softly and anxiously.

"I should be sorry to doubt it. He is sure to have kept her *bearings steadily* in mind."

"But you spoke to him as if you doubted it."

"Well, Miss Inglefield, I was irritated by his manner of addressing me. But I did wrong. I have no business to question his judgment."

"Not even if you think he is not quite right in his mind?" she asked in her simple way.

"Oh, we mustn't imagine him wrong there. He may no longer have his temper under control, but he knows his professional work," I replied quickly, for I wanted to clear *that* fancy out of her head, at any rate; since such an ingenuous, child-like girl was she that she was pretty sure to let him know by her behaviour she distrusted his sanity, if the notion that he was no longer a responsible being got fixed in her.

She continued asking me questions, particularly catching hold of what I had said to Pipes about the bare horizon from the foretopsail yard being a mighty disappointment if he was correct in his calculations; and I had to answer her and satisfy her in the best way I could; but I was not quite successful, for I noticed a tear in her eye when she jumped up suddenly and went to the rail and overhung it for awhile gazing ahead with the white and blinding sunshine on the lower part of her face, and her profile clear against the southern blue that had deepened with the advancing morning, and now thrilled among the restful, widely-scattered clouds in sapphire folds that seemed to heave like the swell of the sea under the ardcency of the flaming luminary which hung burning over our port yardarms, and whose light in the water was like burnished tin with white-hot needles flying off it into the dazzled and tortured sight.

Well, in less than half an hour after I had come down, the light air failed, and it fell a dead calm, with nothing but a lazy flutter from aloft now and then, and an horizon opening up in grey, gleaming streaks and a thin, milky blue into the far-off sky, here and there a dull brassy tinge, as if in places the distant water caught the fiery dazzle that stood nearly up and down like a flaming column in the middle of the ocean, whilst the ship began to slew softly on her heel as though her vibratory jibbooms were within the attraction of some mighty magnet moving from east to west behind the sea-line. It would have been a punishment for Miss Inglefield to remain below, and as the heat of the deck was more than a Gold Coast negro could have stood, I ventured to ask Captain Pipes if he would allow the short awning to be stretched. Instead of answering me, he bawled to the Finn and Eye, who had been relieved by Nipper at the wheel, to lay aft and spread the awning. They came along slowly, and I particularly noticed that Grondhal cast the awning adrift with a strong air of sullen discontent in his manner, and that he muttered to the ordinary seaman when they were near each other. Whether Pipes observed this I do not know; to me he seemed absorbed in *looking around the sea*. His red face shining with sweat was full of the impatience and rage the calm had raised in him, and

thought it not a little ominous that the Finn's audacity was equal to allowing him to "growl" and "soger" within ear-reach and close under the eye of a skipper whose temper was what Pipes's then was.

However, the awning was spread, and I carried Miss Agnes's chair under it and seated her with a powerful binocular glass in her lap, so that she could soothe her impatience by keeping a close watch upon the horizon ; though if there was nothing to be seen before, there was less now, to use an Irishism, for the atmosphere had thickened up out of the calm, and the sea-line had grown faint, though it could be followed undulating in the heat. "A pretty prospect," thought I, "if we have a repetition of yesterday's fog and breeze ! In that case, it's more than probable, even if the wreck should keep afloat, that she will be as lost to us as if she were among the green navies at the bottom of the ocean."

But the calm did not last long. A catspaw blurring the water into dark blue, and shivering the sun's reflection into a softly swaying mass of flashing, blinding gems came stealing along out of the north-east. Pipes, seeing it coming, ordered the yards to be braced up to it, and I went to the helm that Nipper might give a hand at the ropes. The spokes felt like hot iron in my grasp, and when I looked at the forward part of the ship through the shadow of the short awning, I could see the main and foremasts trembling in the heat rising off the decks like the reflection of a tree in a running stream, whilst the sunlight lay like molten gold betwixt the shadows of the sails on the staring white planks, every waft aft of the main-sail that hung in brilliant white festoons in the grip of the bunt-lines and leechlines with an arch of violet sky over the fire-veined black yard, sending a sickly, blistering smell of paint and oil and tar to me. The stewards turned out along with the cook and helped the three sailors. Pipes sang out his orders rapidly and fiercely ; but though there seemed no lack of willingness on the part of the steward and Nipper, the others responded in a grumbling manner and slowly to the skipper's commands, especially the Finn, who would frequently pause to ostentatiously wipe his forehead and to growl aloud to the man nearest him.

"Now then, men," shouted Pipes, "bear a hand and get your mizzen-topsail yards braced up."

All went to the braces with the exception of the Finn, who coolly walked forward to one of the scuttle-butts.

"Hi, you Grundle !" roared Pipes, with a note in his bellow that instantly brought the man to a stand. "Where are you off to ?"

"To get a drink of water," replied the fellow sulkily. "I'm hof dead, sir."

"You shall have your drink presently ; but by thunder, you'll do *my bidding first*. So lay aft to these braces, d'ye hear?" yelled Pipes with his face like a lobster, and again and again stamping on the deck in his passion.

The fellow hung in the wind a moment, with a glance at the scuttle-butt, and then a look at his mates ; after which he joined the others with a sullen, swinging roll of his body as he walked, and though the braces led some distance forward of the mizzen rigging, I from the wheel could hear him muttering and cursing amid the intervals of the song Nipper hoarsely delivered as he and the rest of them pulled.

"Well the upper topsail yard—well the t'gallant yard. Haul taut t' loo'ard now ! Jump aft, Nipper, and relieve the gentleman at the wheel."

A mild air was blowing across the decks, the ship had come to her course, and with her yards well forward was once more slowly pushing through the smooth and glittering surface. The main tack was boarded and the sheet hauled aft. I resumed my seat near Miss Inglefield and lighted a cigar, watching the Finn, the under-steward and Eye talking together in the waist, whilst Pipes, with his hand on a backstay, stared ahead of the ship at the horizon, so motionless that no vessel's figurehead could be stiller.

Suddenly the Finn walked right up to him. I noticed his burly, swaggering form, and the hard, impudent, mutinous look that darkened upon his streaming, extraordinary face. "Captain Pipes, if you pleashe."

The old fellow started as though from a trance. It was clear he had been so engrossed in his thoughts that he had not observed the man approach.

"What d'ye want?" he demanded with a scowl.

"Why, me and the oders wants to know for how long ve're expected to verk dis ship. It's twelve sailor man's job. Dere's now dree, und ve never engaged to break our hearts," said he, towering over Pipes and staring into his square face without the least air of respect.

"You'll be expected to work this ship till we've rescued the people aboard the wreck," replied Pipes ; "whether that happens to-day, or to-morrow, or a fortnight hence. So get away forward now."

"Vere ish de wreck?" said the Finn, turning his head to glance at the sea.

"Where you'll have to help us to find her. So get away forward, d'ye hear, you infernal loafer ! Off with ye ! By heavens, if I'd have foreseen this, I'd have had ye chucked overboard again after my men had picked you up. You're fit for a dog's death, and you should have had it. Go forward !" with a violent stamp of the foot.

"Look here, shkipper," said the man hotly, with an indescribable note of insolence in his voice, to which his broken English and extremely unpleasant voice may have contributed something, "*I com here to shpeak you fair und civil, und I expect fair und civil treatment. Dere is but dree sailor mans in dis ship. Ve are*

villing to dry und sail her to a near port, but ve vill be dom'd if ve vill boxsh dese yards about after dere wreck, which may have sonk, onless you can say she vill soon heave in sight. Ve did not shign to break our hearts."

I never could have imagined it possible that old Pipes's square face was capable of assuming an expression so absolutely diabolical. He listened with quivering nostrils, blazing eyes, working mouth, and furious scowl, both fists clenched, and body inclined forward as if he was only waiting for the Finn to end his speech to throttle him. Indeed, I was so sure that this was his intention, that I threw down my cigar in readiness to protect the old man, as best I could, from the inevitable result of a hand-to-hand conflict with his huge, heavy, and savage antagonist. To my surprise, however, the moment the seaman ceased speaking, Pipes turned on his heel and ran below.

The Finn stood irresolute, glancing forward at the cook, steward, and Eye, who hung together near the galley watching this piece of business on the quarter-deck. I approached the fellow and said, "Grondhal, why in God's name, do you want to embarrass the captain at such a time as this? We shall be sighting the wreck shortly; any work that needs doing I'm willing to take my share in. There are men enough to handle the ship in such weather as this; and considering that you owe your life to the seamen who are aboard the wreck, you surely won't refuse to stand by them, even though we should need to go on creeping about for a whole week to find them—though that's quite unlikely, since, if this air holds, we may have the hull in sight from the masthead in another hour."

He stared at me with a half grin but without interrupting me, and then said, "You are not de shkipper. Vot business is dis of yours? Ve dree are sailors on dom bad pay," looking as he spoke at Nipper, "und pork und food quite enoff to turn your genteel stomach. You hov your gerl to talk to," nodding towards Miss Inglefield, "und good shiores und comfortib cabin, und if you verk you please yourself. *You* mind your own business. You are not master here."

I was not so much enraged by this speech as by the hulking ruffian's reference to Miss Inglefield, and the inexpressibly bold jerking of his head towards her, followed, when he had ended, by a grin at Nipper. Into what mess my exasperation would have carried me I do not know; for, big as this Grondhal was, I can honestly say it would not have cost me much consideration to try the persuasion of my fist upon his singular face, and Heaven alone knows what might have been the result of that sort of argument upon the temper of the others; but all on a sudden old Pipes burst out through the companion hatch, rushed towards the Finn, and *coming to a stand* at about half a dozen paces from him, levelled a *five-chamber* revolver straight at the man's head. The barrel of it *was bright, and the first flash of it in the sun made me think for a*

second that the captain had actually pulled the trigger. Miss Inglefield uttered a faint scream, and jumping out of her chair, ran to my side. At the sight of the weapon Grondhal drooped and cowered with his arm over his face, and stepped backwards a fathom or two, shrinking and bending and crying out, "For God's sake, don't shoot, shkipper. It's murder if you shoot me, capt'n." I shall never forget that picture. It was not the unexpectedness of it only : it was its coming into a voyage promoted for pleasure and health, an adventure indeed that was intended in its way to be a gay, summer ocean yatching-trip, that made it even more desperately impressive as an incident than what had happened when the two boats started for a race, when the wreck was swallowed up in the fog. There stood Pipes with his figure upreared into a perfectly theatrical posture, his face crimson, his eyes glaring, his right arm straight out like a pump-handle, and terminating in the deadly weapon whose barrel sparkled like the flash of explosion after explosion as its vibratory muzzle covered the cowardly, cringing, recoiling, imploring ruffian whose life Pipes seemed to have saved from drowning in order that he might shoot him.

And yet I could not wonder at the brute's fright. I honestly believed the old skipper meant to send a bullet through him, and I was the more disposed to think so by fully understanding that Pipes had lost his wits for the time, for it was now impossible to look at him with his purple face and stag attitude and singular expression in the mouth that was like a scornful savage exultation contrasting oddly with the fury in his eyes, without perceiving that whatever the cause might be that was at work in him, he came very dangerously near to being mad just then.

"Now," roared he, "you mutinous Dutch hound ! d'ye mean to go forward or not ?"

The man muttering something behind his arm, with which he protected his face, continued to step backwards, evidently from his doubled-up attitude and other suggestions terror-stricken by the eye of the pistol-barrel looking straight at him, and by the equally alarming face of the infuriate old man behind it ; but not steering a true course, the heel of his foot struck against a coil of rope carelessly thrown down abreast of the winch that stood abaft the main-mast, and he pitched heavily on to his back with a thump of his head upon the deck that sounded like the fall of a four-pound shot. He got up stupidly, rubbing his head and cursing, whilst Pipes shouted out, "Now you see what I mean ! you've discovered what I'm capable of, at last. Forward with ye, I say !" with a plunge of his right leg and a wild flourish of his pistol that instantly caused the Finn to whirl round and march hastily along the waist ; "I'll teach you to mutiny aboard the *Silver Sea*. Let any man dispute my orders or stop to arguefy and ask questions, and by the livin' Creator, if these five balls aren't enough satisfaction for his curiosity,

then we'll see if there's not enough in five cases of cartridges below to ease his mind. So now you know your condition !”

He thrust the pistol into his pocket, but continued staring furiously forward at the three men whom the Finn had joined, but who, growing uneasy under the steadfast scowl of the old chap, sneaked off. He then turned and took a long savage look at Nipper ; and seemingly concluding that he had now done all that was needful for the maintenance of discipline, and for ensuring the discharge of all necessary duties hereafter, he began to pace the deck, walking with extreme rapidity as though perfectly insensible to the broiling heat of the sun, with an occasional pause to glance along the whole circumference of the sea-line with the most mechanical air that can be imagined.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WE SIGHT THE WRECK.

It may easily be supposed that this sort of thing was quite enough to make one wild to sight the wreck and recover the people on her, even though there were no other reason for the eagerness. It was a bad sign that Pipes should have paid so little regard to the presence of Miss Inglefield, as to flourish a pistol before her, and so render the Finn's insolence as tragical in its way as if blood had been shed ; though I don't mean to say that he could have hit upon a better expedient for enforcing his orders ; it was bad, because it was another illustration of the singular change that had come over him, since, before his mind was upset, he was just one of those skippers whose first care, in all troubles, would be to provide that their passengers, and especially the women, should not be alarmed. The poor girl was horribly frightened, and was as pale as death when I led her back to her chair under the awning. The mere notion of Pipes having the pistol in his pocket made her afraid to look at him or ask me questions. I noticed this, and assured her that there was nothing that need terrify her in what had occurred.

“You see,” said I, “the impudent Finn wouldn't go forward when commanded to do so. He's too big a man for Pipes to handle with his fists. Consequently there was nothing for it but to threaten to shoot him. It's a lesson that'll do the ungrateful, mutinous lubber good. He'll work now with alacrity, I've no doubt, and it's a useful hint to any of the others who may need it. You know it would never do for these fellows to refuse to work the ship in search of the wreck. What would become of our friends, who, we may be sure, are at this moment straining their eyes around the hot horizon in search of the gleam of our canvas ?”

“Oh, why cannot we see the wreck ?” she cried, clasping her hands and looking at me with her blue eyes swimming. “It is too

dreadful that so much should happen since yesterday. If we find them, I do hope Mr. Edwards and Mr. Hornby will order the ship to be turned for home. Papa and mamma, I am sure, will insist upon it. We have had quite enough of the sea, Mr. Aubyn. It would be pleasant if all were well ; but with my parents and our friends and sailors lost to us——”

“Only for a few hours,” I interrupted.

“And Captain Pipes crazy,” she continued, almost breathlessly, “and that horrid Finn mutinying, the voyage has become abominable.”

“The thing I most regret is that Pipes should have allowed this business of the wreck to ruin his temper,” said I. “He’s not to be approached. I daren’t question him or attempt to converse for fear of being insulted. All the rest is a mere flea-bite, for we shall be having the colonel and Mrs. Inglefield and Edwards and his daughter and the whole party safe on board to-night or to-morrow, and what will signify the Finn’s conduct when the fore-castle is full again? Ay, and after all,” said I, smiling at her and speaking lightly, “Pipes’s temper need be nothing more than a flea-bite too ; for he’ll be resuming his old character when our party is complete once more, and all this business will be just something to thrill our friends with, whilst they in their turn will, I have no doubt, be able to astonish our weak nerves with their experiences aboard the wreck. I only hope the night’s exposure won’t revive Edwards’s gout. It’ll increase the general misery if his limbs stiffen and he falls helpless.”

“The voyage has become horrible ; it *must* be given up,” she exclaimed with a touch of vehemence in her half-suppressed voice that made one think of her father.

“Yes, I have no doubt it will be abandoned ; none of them will have the heart to go on with it,” said I, biting my lip to conceal a smile ; for though, Heaven knows, the mood I was in was the reverse of merry, yet I seemed perversely to find something ludicrous in the idea of Edwards being made rigid by an attack of rheumatic gout on board the wreck, and cursing himself for his folly in chasing health into the lonely wilds of the Atlantic, to find himself landed on a crazy hull, and left there to absorb the chilly dews by night and to be roasted brown by day : in short, to be fixed in such a situation that were he a starving pauper without the means of obtaining a crust of bread or a drink of water, he couldn’t be worse off. Oh, the sea plays men and women some scurvy tricks ! How often, I wondered, had my hospitable, gouty friend turned his thoughts to his luxurious home in Harley Street during the hours he had spent on the wreck ? Upon my word, if Pipes had fully grasped all the fears and sufferings of that drifting party of ladies and gentlemen, for whose comfort and safety he was answerable, it *was* small wonder that he chafed and acted like a madman, even if *his mind at bottom* were still sound enough.

Shortly before noon the old chap went below for his sextant to take the altitude of the sun. The breeze was extremely light, but it held, and the ship with her yards against the rigging broke into wrinkles the flashing waters which the high and cloudless luminary had transmuted into gold from the trembling, hidden, distant edge of the deep in the north down to our vessel's side, and left behind her a short and narrow furrow of fire, beyond which the blue of the ocean, deepened by the breathing of the air, stood up liquid and tender, with a shooting of silver lights in it where the lines of the little ripples caught the radiance as though it was a daylight imitation of the night sky, with stars and meteors of its own as bright as the reality. Yet the ocean looked frightfully solitary. There was a wildness in its placid beauty one would never have thought of finding in leagues of rolling surges and of white froth glaring out from the shadow of a leaden heaven. The filminess and faintness here and there upon the horizon enlarged the sense of its magnitude; they hung like gossamer curtains, suggesting rather than veiling to the eye God knows what terrifying distance. I could not behold a sea-bird to give the least movement of life to the boundless watery area of blue, and dazzling sunshine, and bits of pale, streaky azure, and a windward surface of foamless ripples slipping under the dazzle like the dimples and wrinkles on a baby's face under the light of its smiles.

No bell was struck, but I knew when Pipes had "made eight bells" by his dropping the sextant from his square face.

The time passed, the breeze keeping steady all the while. Our pace was between two and a half and three knots. Just before one o'clock, Pipes sent Nipper on to the fore-royal yard to see if there was anything in sight; he mounted the rigging leisurely, and I watched him overhanging the yard with his hand shading his eyes, peering earnestly; then down came his voice, sounding hollowly among the sails: "Nothing to be seen up here, sir." Miss Inglefield bit her lip, and a forlorn expression came into her face. But for my part I was not disappointed. If we had measured five or six miles since I had peered from aloft, I was tolerably sure the ocean had pretty nearly contracted to that extent from the dimness that had thickened down into the atmosphere; and that, even if we were heading direct for the wreck—though of this no man among us could be sure—she would be invisible still from the height of the mast, when a couple of hours since she'd have lain plain to a sharp eye or a telescope. Pipes, when the fellow bawled down his report, muttered hoarsely to himself, and walked in a fierce way to the binnacle and scowled into it, and then gazed around him, but in a sort of manner I could not mistake, that made me see he wanted to keep *me* off. I felt that if I so much as *looked* a doubt of the accuracy of the course he was steering, he would fall wild.

Presently the German under-steward stood up in the companion and called out sulkily that lunch was ready. "I'll keep the deck

till you've done, sir," said Pipes hurriedly to me. "You needn't hurry." Miss Inglefield said she had no appetite; she preferred to remain on deck. So I fetched her a glass of wine and some biscuits, and then seated my lonely self at the table before a piece of cold salt beef, off which, and a biscuit and a tumbler of brandy and water, I contrived to make a fair meal.

Whilst I was eating, the steward, after a look at the companion steps, and a glance at the open skylights, said to me in a low voice as he put the brandy decanter before me, "Do you think there is any chance of our ever sighting the wreck, sir?"

"Every chance."

"But ain't there a possibility of her having foundered, sir?"

"That remains to be discovered."

"Ay, but if we're to keep all on searching for her, she bein' at the bottom of the sea meanwhile, and the parties having put off in their boats and being rescued for all we know, it'll come desperate hard upon us men; for I for one arn't good for any work aloft; it makes me giddy to look down; waiting is what I signed articles for, and to keep me doing steward's work and on deck all night, and performin' the duty of an able seaman'll end in breaking down my spirits."

"There's no use in talking to me," said I, shortly. "The captain's still aboard, you know."

"Yes," he exclaimed, with another nervous look at the skylights, "but who's agoing to talk to a captain who draws a pistol upon a man if he steps aft to make a complaint? And besides, sir, the captain's a changed individual. He's turned fiercer than any master I ever sailed with. What the cook says is that this here business has unloosed a screw in the captain's head, and the fear among us men is that his determination to find the wreck, although she may be sunk, 'll end in a delusion that'll keep him sailing this here ship about till all the hands that's left is reduced to skeletons. You're as much concerned as any of us, sir, and that's why I take the liberty of addressing you."

"All that's very well," said I, not at all appreciating his arguments, nor liking his allusion to myself; "but, first of all, we've got no right to suppose that the wreck *has* sunk; anyway, it was only yesterday afternoon that we lost sight of her, and to give up seeking her in less than twenty-four hours would be like murdering the passengers and seamen on board her. Pray, if you were one of them, what would *you* think if we turned tail and left you to a horrible fate of starvation and slow death under the pretence that the job of working this seven hundred ton ship was more than eight of us—for you must include the captain and me—could manage?"

This silenced him; he looked sheepish, I thought, and moved away. I considered all this to represent rather a mere love of grumbling than any other meaning, provoked by Pipes's fierce

manner, and the heat and the unusual strain put upon the men; yet I also fancied that the Finn might be responsible for it to an extent, and I remember thinking that whatever might be the state of Pipes's mind, he showed himself in possession of excellent reason when he told the ruffianly foreigner he'd have had him chucked overboard again after his rescue could he have foreseen the behaviour he was to exhibit later on. I returned on deck, and shortly afterwards the skipper went below, apparently to work out his sights, for, though I several times looked through the skylight, I did not see him at the table. Grondhal was at the helm. I found Miss Inglefield standing on the main deck, looking over the bulwarks in the shadow of the mainsail. I asked her why she had left the shelter of the awning, and she replied that she was afraid of the Finn, she did not like to remain near him. I tried to pooh-pooh this, telling her that the fellow was an arrant cur, big as he was, and that she had nothing to fear from him, though, for all that, it was possible to sympathize with her feelings when one looked at the hulking creature, leaning with an air of defiant indolence upon the spokes rather than grasping them, with his bit of a face upon his immense head working all over from the gnawing of his jaws upon a plug of tobacco, and his small, evil eyes, which seemed to be the merest holes for the admission of light, wandering here and there, as restless in their peering as his uncouth form was quiet.

"Well, I am afraid of him," said she. "He is a dreadful-looking man. But now that you are on deck, Mr. Aubyn, I will return to the awning—if you will come too."

"Presently," I replied. "I should just like to take another peep for the wreck aloft. The horizon seems to have cleared somewhat."

I put my head over the rail and stared forward. The breeze had gathered a little more weight since I had gone below; it was not sufficiently strong to run the blue ripples swiftly enough to break, but it had deepened the azure of the water, the pearly appearance had died out of the margin, and the distant faintnesses were brightening into clear sky; the clouds, few and far between, were also in perceptible motion, and there was even a light swelling of the topsails, with a steady pulling of the loftier canvas, though the courses still swang in and out, and the water crisped and tinkled along the bends in beads and bubbles and prismatic blobs of foam which ran away astern as fast as a man could walk.

I stepped aft for the glass, and giving Miss Inglefield a smile as I passed her, I got into the fore shrouds and climbed as high as the upper topsail yard, upon which I perched myself; and then adjusting the glass to my focus, I pointed it at our lee beam, and with the utmost care swept the water-line thence forward to as far as the jibs would let me see. There was nothing in sight that way, and, depressed by the disappointment raised in me, I crossed into

ther quarter of the yard and proceeded to examine the
on the beam, intending to sweep the hinder sea presently.
n the lens of the glass bore so close upon the line of the
bom as to bring the stay and a bit of the canvas of the jib
field of it, I took notice of a minute black speck upon the
er, about the length of half my thumb as it might be, below
ruling that marked the junction of sky and ocean. I
gerly and with a beating heart, not yet liking to sing out ;
r intently watching the object for at least five minutes, I
re that what I was viewing was the hull of a dismasted
nd that consequently the wreck we were in search of was at
ight.

is I hailed the deck. Miss Inglefield in the shadow of the
was gazing up at me with her face like a star all that
down. When I called, she moved eagerly and looked
er. I could see no one on deck, for the Finn at the wheel
len from me. The girl ran to the galley, and then the cook
t.

ow there ! " I bawled.

lo ! " shouted the cook.

the captain that the wreck's in sight, bearing right ahead,
: we're steering for her as true as a hair."

alked aft whilst Miss Inglefield went to the bulwarks to
the sea under the flying jibboom where, poor girl, there
ing to view but the booms trembling into the blue sky and
e of the jib-shadows shivering among the ripples under the
again directed the telescope at the distant speck and
it fixedly. I was thus occupied when I was disturbed by
nd of heavy breathing, and glancing down I spied Pipes
ing up the weather topmast rigging with the grace and in
ure of an erect turtle. He got on to the yard alongside of
pointed to me to hand him the glass and show him the
I did both, but his hands trembled so that it was some
before he could satisfy his mind.

," said he slowly, with his eye still at the telescope, "that's
:k sure enough. What else can it be if it isn't the hull ?
l Almighty, what an ocean of trouble that blasted object has
me ! Here, Mr. Aubyn, take the glass for a moment. My
ems full of fire."

tilly closed the telescope and thrust it into my pocket so as
le to put both hands on him if he should want help, for I
that a sort of tottering as of swooning seized him, and the
t I took the glass he lay over the yard with his breast upon
his fingers squeezing his temples so convulsively that he
his cap off his head, and it fell into the top. I watched
hout speaking for some time, hoping to heaven that he'd
r rally ; for though I was no ill hand at climbing, I was not
t a sailor aloft as to know how to handle this man so as to

save him or even protect myself, if he should begin to act insanely; and you would have understood my feelings had you looked down and observed how giddily distant the sea appeared under us, and what a narrow, white streak the decks of the clipper made for the support of the towering fabric of mast and hemp and cloth among the interlaced heights of which Pipes and I hung.

Presently he lifted his face out of his hands and wiped it with a handkerchief; then felt his head for his cap, and not finding it, said with a touch of his old manner, "Gor' bless me! did I come aloft bareheaded, Mr. Aubyn?"

"No," I replied; "there's your cap in the top. It fell off just now."

He cast his eyes down with an expression of bewilderment, and then glanced at me in a manner that caused me to feel glad he found me grave.

"Captain," said I, "there is no doubt that yonder object's the wreck. You have borne her bearings marvellously in mind. See! she lies scarcely half a point to leeward of the flying jibboom end."

"D'yc think I've used the sea all these years not to know my business?" he answered huskily, grasping the jackstay with one hand and shading his eyes with the other to peer ahead.

"How long will it be before we have her plain from the deck?" I asked blandly and soothingly, for if I had little disposition to notice his rudeness or manners on deck I had none at all up here, where a thrust of the elbow might mean a fall, whether the deck or the water were struck, fit to make a man sick to think of.

"'Twixt two and three hours if this draught holds," he replied.

I got into the rigging, and was descending when he called to me to leave him the telescope. I handed it to him and asked him if I should bring him his cap out of the top.

"No, sir," he answered. "Let it lie there. My head wants cooling. Here I shall stop till I make the hull out plainer. Please to tell that villain the Finn to keep her as she lies—nothing off; he may luff half a point if she'll bear it," turning his head round to take a squint at the weather leech of the main royal.

I went down the rigging with alacrity enough, conceiving the old fellow to be much safer alone aloft than were I alongside of him; though it was a mad trick in him, I thought, to offer his bare head to the fierce heat of the noontide equatorial sun that poured full down upon him, above the main top-gallant staysail. But I knew it would be idle, that it might merely exasperate him to urge him to resume his cap; and so, as I say, I descended nimbly to the deck, feeling not a little easy when I had my feet on the comparative *terra firma* of the white, hot planks. I delivered his injunctions to the Finn, who rudely and sulkily nodded in reply, *instead of giving the customary ship-shape rejoinder to helm orders, and then joined Miss Ingfield.*

"Is the wreck *really* in sight?" she cried almost breathlessly, so great was her eagerness to question me.

I told her yes, there was no doubt of it; an object was in sight right ahead that could be nothing else than the wreck. "If this breeze holds," said I, "she will be visible from the deck in three hours or less, and, please God, by six o'clock this evening we may hope to have the whole party on board."

She flushed up with pleasure, her soft eyes glittering. "Oh, what a story they will have to tell!" she cried; an exclamation that put the picture before me, and in my mind's eye I saw Edwards and the others sitting on the quarter-deck, relating the experiences of the night to us; the colonel shouting out a hundred by Georges and by Joves, and demanding that the helm of the *Silver Sea* should be instantly shifted for home; his wife hysterical, Hornby apologetic, and hopping about bird-like in his delight at recovering the ship; stately Margaret Edwards, thoughtful and depressed with the memory of the thing she was fresh from; her papa hearty and cheerful, pretending to treat the incident as a fine, romantic adventure, but as willing as the colonel that the ship's head should be turned for home. It brightened my spirits merely to think of them as being with us again; but what would be said when I spoke of the change in Pipes's manner, his rudeness to me, the incident of the pistol? Was the old fellow's behaviour a matter worth mentioning, should he resume his former bearing when the party were safe? I looked up at him as, bareheaded, he leaned across the topsail yard with the glass at his eye, and made up my mind to settle with Miss Inglefield to say nothing about him. But our friend the Finn was a different matter; and when I turned my eyes towards him as he slouched in a negligent, insolent posture at the wheel, I determined to spare no pains to have him clapped into irons for the rest of the voyage, if Pipes hung back from punishing him in that way; so greatly did I dislike and fear the brute, and so convinced was I that he was capable of breeding great disaffection among the men, and causing us the utmost anxiety.

The time passed slowly. Pipes remained aloft an whole hour; he then came down, picking his cap out of the top as he descended. The sun in that time had burnt the back of his neck and the left side of his face a reddish brown, and as he had jammed his cap upon one side of his head, with the naval peak forking skywards like the beak of a drinking hen, I had some difficulty to contain my laughter as he lurched along the deck.

"She's the wreck, right enough, miss," said he, addressing Miss Inglefield, and going to the companion to put the glass in its brackets. "She's lumping and black, without an inch of mast visible. There couldn't be *two* of them, you know. We'll be having your pa and ma aboard again soon, now."

The girl smiled at him and made some glad answer; but I could easily see she was too frightened of him to ask questions. He went

below to cool his fiery face with a wash, and on returning took his stand near the lee mizzen rigging, steadfastly watching the sea past the bow, with an occasional roll of his eyes at the sails and a glance aft at the helmsman. Cranky or not, thought I, the old fellow has shown an amazing exactitude in seeking the wreck, unless, indeed, there was more of luck in it than fair reckoning, which I could not tell. The Finn, who had been relieved at the wheel, had climbed on to the foreyard to look for the hull; and the cook, Nipper, and the German under-steward overhung the fore-castle rail. We sailed softly along amid a wonderful stillness. The breeze hushed the sails, and not a sound came from aloft. You heard nothing but the gentle rippling of the passing water, that under the bends took a gleam of its blue surface off the glossy sides of the ship, with now and again at long interval the faintest moan of the rudder when the fellow at the wheel moved the helm a spoke or two. The silence upon the boundless and flashing weather sea, for the sun still hung betwixt our main and mizzenmasts, was like a palpable thing borne down to the senses by the light though burning breeze. I tell you, it was wonderful to look ahead and feel that behind the azure line there, athwart the bows, our friends and seamen were hidden in a fabric that from the rigging might be seen lying like a speck of dirt upon the glassy margin of the polished curvexity we were sailing upon. The thought positively startled one with the idea it brought of the ocean's immensity and of man's littleness.

It was nearly four o'clock in the afternoon when the wreck showed upon the horizon. It was sighted forward first by the ordinary seaman, I think, who sang out the news to us aft. I went below for my own glass, as Pipes had taken possession of the ship's out of the companion, and after focussing it I held it against a backstay for Miss Inglefield to look through.

Our postures brought her face close to me; and as I watched it with the nostrils trembling and the lips quivering, and her small, gloved hand keeping one eye closed, I thought it a tender, maidenly, childlike, pretty face, something to nestle fondly and trustfully upon a man's heart, something for him to caress and soothe, and to toy with, too, for the delight the touch would find in the soft, golden hair and the delicate rounded softness of chin and brows. Such a fancy seemed a kind of impertinence in a time of trying excitement and expectation like this; but her face, as I have said, lay very close to me, and a fellow's moods will have their way spite of their irrelevancy to what is happening. Indeed, I should have lapsed into a waking dream, I think, and have forgotten all about the wreck by drifting into thoughts about this girl and the queenly Margaret, had she not brought up my reverie "all standing" by exclaiming, "I see the wreck distinctly, Mr. Aubyn. Will they be able to see us too?"

"Oh, they'll have made us out long ago; we're so tall, you know."

"How excited they will be! how slow they will think the *Silver Sea* is!"

"They won't be sure that we *are* the *Silver Sea* yet awhile."

"No, I dare say, they will only see our white sails. When shall we be able to make them out, as you say, Mr. Aubyn?"

"Not yet a bit," I answered. "A man's head is but a little thing here below. However, there's the wreck; and I pray God we may find all well aboard the wretched craft!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I BOARD THE WRECK.

THE breeze veered into the north after the wreck had been in sight half an hour, and forced us to brace in the yards. The sky that way became filmed over with small mother-o'-pearl-like clouds, which ruled the blue straight, like a length of sand on the margin of a tideless sea, and gave an exquisite depth to the sapphire. It was not long, when the hull was fairly this side the horizon, before I could make out such points in her, through the glass, as enabled me to know for certain that she was the wreck our party had yesterday rowed aboard of. She stood tall and black upon the water, maybe through most of her cargo having been jettisoned, and now and again I fancied I could discern a star or two of yellow light upon her quarter—for she lay broadside to us, her head to the south—where I had on the previous day noticed some gilt scroll-work. Methought she would offer a fearful obstacle for a ship to run into on a dark night, as dangerous to the full as a head of rock. I gazed at her intently, but could see no signs of life aboard. To be sure, she was still a long distance away, yet my glass was an extremely powerful one, and I could not help thinking one should be able to witness some movement in her through it, or some conspicuous signal: for *that* our sailors, you might think, would have been certain to contrive when they saw a sail heading their way.

From time to time Pipes raised his telescope and stared at her without a move for five minutes together. Occasionally Miss Inglefield would ask me if I saw the people on board; to which I would answer no, not yet: it might be because her bulwarks were high; but though this and the like replies satisfied her for a while, for my part my mind had misgiven me, when I made out the sparkling of the wreck's quarter-decorations without perceiving anything moving above the line of her rails. If life there were on board of her, it should be visible *now*, for I could distinctly make out the raffle of her standing rigging trailing over the side. The sun stood

over our port-quarter, and threw its hot, white, slanting beams right ahead of us on to the hull, so that she lay, as it might be, in a very rain of light, her sides black as jet in it against the blue, and the horizon coming up to her stem and stern in a sweep, that made one think of her being hugged towards us by the glass-like girdle.

"Are *no* signs of them yet visible, Mr. Aubyn?" exclaimed Miss Inglefield tremulously.

I could only let fall the telescope from my eye, with a shake of the head.

"Can you distinguish any appearance of life on that wreck, Captain Pipes?" I called out.

"Nothing!" he cried, rounding upon me fiercely, and staring at me as if I had insulted him. "Can *you*, sir?"

"No."

"Then why do you expect that *I* should?" he shouted. "Do you want *me* to be the first to tell you that they're all drowned?"

"For God's sake!" I cried, with a passionate deprecatory sweep of the hand, advancing by a stride towards him, "remember that Miss Inglefield hears your wild assertions."

She burst into tears as I spoke, and sobbed piteously. The old man looked at her with a working face, and wiped the sweat from his brow by passing his sleeve over it from the elbow to the cuff. There was nothing very remarkable in this action; yet it was done with such an air of bewilderment, as if to cover some heavy confusion of mind he was sensible of but could not dispel, that it put a quite indescribable character into his posture and the emotional conflict expressed by his face. He suddenly turned upon me and growled out, "Leave me alone, Mr. Aubyn, can't ye? It's your questions that make me say things which upset the young lady. *You* 'tend to your own business, and leave me to mind mine."

He turned his back upon me in a heated manner, and again applied himself to inspecting the wreck. I was about to address some consolatory words to Miss Inglefield, when my attention was diverted by observing a man who was looking over the fore-castle rail pointing out to the others an object he had spied about a mile distant and some three or four points upon the lee bow. I followed the indication of his hand and perceived something that came and went in a flash as bright as a musket would emit upon the water that way; and on levelling my glass at it, I at once saw that it was the keel of a white, capsized boat that fitfully sparkled in the sunshine as the ripples overran it and then left it wet to the light. I confess that my blood turned cold when I saw this thing; for it was not only that all our boats were white as yonder one clearly was; her proximity to the wreck gave a fearful meaning to her as she lay keel up on the calm sea. I was extremely anxious that Miss Inglefield *should not see her*, for I very well knew that the sight of it *would put the same dreadful thought into her that had*

come to me : but unfortunately Pipes caught sight of the fellow forward pointing : he peered a moment or two at the sparkling object in the water, and perceiving what it was, turned his head furiously towards the helmsman and roared out, "Let her go off—port your helm! let her go off! over with it!" and as the man obeyed he watched till the ship's head pointed almost directly at the boat, and then gave the order to steady.

These commands and the old fellow's wild manner of looking over the rail caused Miss Inglefield to know that there was something besides the wreck to see. She stood up with her eyes dim with the tears she had wept, and instantly catching sight of the glimmering wet, white keel and bottom of the boat, asked me what it was. There was nothing for it but to answer her truthfully, so I said, "It is a capsized boat." She raised her hands, with such a look of horror in her face that I never could have believed so soft and maidenly a countenance could have expressed so much tragical emotion.

"Is it one of the boats they went in?" she asked.

"It may be—but we cannot yet be sure. But suppose it is?" I replied. "It does not follow that any one was in her when she upset. She may have broken away from the wreck during the night and capsized."

"Oh, Mr. Aubyn, if my father and mother—if our friends—if—if my father and mother should be drowned!" she stammered, with her lips whitening, and her hands locked in a posture of agony.

I was so much upset myself that her misery was more than I could bear at that moment, and I crossed the deck to have another look at the wreck, in the hope that now I should be able to see some signs of our people aboard. Every five minutes had made her plainer in the glass. My telescope showed her so clear that had a human head been visible above the bulwark rails, I must have seen it. No! I could not mistake. She was as utterly deserted as she had been on the previous day when she first hove in sight; everything was stirless from her taffrail to the stump of her bowsprit. The sunshine flashed out every tint—the greenish sheathing, the yellow gilt stuff, the ink-black sides, the white figurehead, the lengths of tarry rigging writhing like escaping snakes out of the channels: and she lay in the frame of the lens motionless and lifeless, like a painting of what she was instead of a bitter reality.

I returned in silence to my place by the side of Miss Inglefield. No one spoke as the light breeze swept us slowly past the boat. We ran by so close that a coil of rope might easily have been flung upon the inverted fabric. The blue, translucent water showed us her form, and we could see it the better for our ship becalming it as we glided along. *There* was the whaleboat shape our boats had, and all doubt was ended by a glimpse of the flag painted upon the bows. *The men forward* stared aft at us. Pipes followed the boat on to our quarter, his eyes glued to it, his head moving with its passage, his

face hard as stone and motionless, save but for his head, as though what he beheld had blasted the life out of his body and limbs.

"What is the meaning of that?" I cried to him, forced to speak by the fear and grief that worked in me, for it is not in language to convey to you how that capsized boat accentuated the fearful suggestion of the lifeless appearance of the wreck.

"Ask me no questions, Mr. Aubyn," he answered in a voice I should not have known for his. "Look at the lady."

She had fainted, falling in a kneeling position under the bulwarks, and lay with her back supported by a stanchion. In the same breath he roared out at the man to the wheel to luff, and bring the ship to her course for the wreck again.

I raised the girl in my arms—I had not seen her fall, for she was on my right and Pipes on my left, and she had swooned when I turned to the captain—I raised her, I say, and carried her under the awning, laying her tenderly on the deck and supporting her head on my arm, and beckoned to the steward who was forward. He came aft quickly, and I sent him for some cold water and a little brandy, and after a bit I restored the poor girl to consciousness, and seated her comfortably in an easy-chair under the awning, and where the air blew pleasantly and refreshingly between the empty davits at which one of our absent boats had swung. This tender fanning soon gave her back her full memory and strength. I saw her cast her eyes astern at the sea in the direction where she imagined the capsized boat lay, whilst a violent shudder ran through her, and then she fixed her gaze upon the wreck, which she could just see under the foot of the courses, and watched it with such sadness that the look came as near to a heart-broken expression as it is possible for one to imagine.

"If they are not on the wreck," said she presently, "must it be certain that they are drowned?"

"They are not on the wreck," I replied, bringing my glass from it; "there is no doubt about that. Not the least sign of anything living is visible; and I cannot be mistaken, for this telescope brings the hull to within a hundred fathoms of me. But assuredly there being nobody aboard does not necessarily mean that the whole party are drowned."

"What do you think?" she cried eagerly.

I looked at her and paused, scarcely knowing whether I ought to tell her what I thought. "Well," I answered slowly after reflecting, whilst she watched me with a sort of passionate wistfulness, "the sight of the capsized boat has put this surmise into my mind—for it's no more; remember that, pray. I think it likely that Hornby and Edwards or your father may have grown alarmed at the prospect of passing the night on the wreck; and after they found the fog hanging without any promise of clearing before it fell dark, they may have determined to take to the boats again and seek us, feeling certain we could not be far off. I don't suppose the mates

would have ventured such a thing of their own judgment ; but Hornby's the owner of this vessel, and if he insisted they might obey. It is certain they must have left the wreck, for there's nobody aboard ; and that having happened, one of the boats capsized, through the sea that the wind raised last night perhaps, or more likely through bad management. But it doesn't follow that her occupants were drowned. The other boat would be close to and might have picked them up. Or," continued I, noticing the horror that came like a darkness into her young face, "let us assume the worst—let us suppose that those who were in the capsized boat were drowned ; you *must* give hope a chance, Miss Inglefield, and believe that your parents were in the other boat—at all events until time proves the truth one way or the other."

"But what is to become of those who *are* in the other boat ?" she exclaimed with a terrified sweep of her eyes along the sea to leeward.

"They may be rescued, picked up by a passing vessel, and carried home in safety, and landed long before our own arrival," I answered.

She drew a deep, sobbing breath, but made no other reply to this.

The breeze now began to fail us again : it fined down into the thinnest current of air, leaving glassy curves on the sea ; our courses and topsails hung up and down with a blind, brilliant stare in their white cloths back at the sun, and one noticed that there was a sort of trembling away of the edges of all the sails into the blue, hot air, as though they were squares of shining metal melting and running at their extremities. Yet it was without impatience that I noticed the languid passage of the bubbles over the side, and the slow sliding of the prismatic eddies from under our counter : for the telescope had made the worst clear ; the wreck was deserted, and our closing her could confirm nothing but that. I could not question that my own conjectures were right ; that the unhappy party of our people, dreading the long, black, windy-looking night aboard the hull, had taken to the boats in the thick of the fog in some wild hope of being seen by us : that one had capsized, perhaps during the darkness when the sea was running, and drowned her occupants, and that the other, if she had lived, was miles out of sight, with her people wasting under the fierce eye of the sun without a drop of water to drink, without so much as a chip of biscuit to eat. What else could have happened ? Nothing that I could imagine, though but for our meeting with the overset boat I might have formed other and hopefuller theories ; and I tell you I shivered like a frightened girl when I thought of the fate I had escaped by the narrowest chance imaginable, and reflected upon the dire disaster that had overtaken the merry company that had yesterday rowed away in high spirits to yonder tall, black, and fatal fabric.

Big she looked, when our ship swam to within half a mile of her, and then stopped motionless with the last faint breath of air that *died in its effort to stir our royals*. By this time the afternoon had *waned, though the sun shining no higher above the molten glass*

like horizon than our cross-jack yardarm had a bite like a sting, and filled the sea under him with a space of fire that sent a heat off it scarcely less fierce that his own beams struck the flesh with. I now noticed that Pipes eyed me from time to time out of the corners of his eyes, as though he had something on his mind and would like to speak to me, but had not the courage. I fancied this might mean that his fears being confirmed concerning the fate of our party, his old sense and character had returned to him, and that he was now willing to talk to me about what had happened, and what he intended to do.

I crossed the deck and said to him, "The wreck is clearly abandoned, captain. Have you any hope that our unfortunate friends have come off with their lives?"

"I'll pass no opinion yet, sir," he replied in a low voice, with a note in it such as you might find in the speech of a man who talks of some one dear to him just dead: "I'd like to see round t'other side of the wreck to discover if the second boat's thereabouts; and the vessel ought to be boarded, just to ascertain if they've left anything in writing to tell what's become of them."

"I'll board her, if you like," said I.

"Will you?" he exclaimed eagerly. "I dursn't leave this ship myself, no, not for the value under the ocean, for there's not a man among the six of 'em I'd trust. The Finn has corrupted the whole of them; I see it, and I know it. And such is now my opinion of them, that I believe those who were left behind would as soon betray them as rowed me away to the wreck and leave them to their fate, whilst they made off with this ship, as them who rowed me away would betray their mates if *they* were left behind."

There was not much encouragement in this sort of talk to induce me to quit the vessel; but though I shared to an extent in Pipes's opinion of the stewards, cook, and seamen, I did not for a moment suppose they were capable of going to the lengths the old skipper suggested. Indeed it seemed to me that his oddness had taken a new phase; for he looked suspiciously around him as he spoke, and at the close of his speech so sunk his voice, with a quick, alarmed running of his eyes forward to the forecabin, where three or four of the men stood idly staring at the wreck, that I had to incline my head his way to catch his words.

"Will you go, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"Certainly," I replied.

He shouted out, "Nipper, cook, Grondhal, lay aft the three of you, and lower away one of these quarter boats, and row this gentleman aboard the wreck."

Nipper arrived nimbly, the cook sulkily, with a sweaty face full of protest, Grondhal slowly and lazily, first coolly knocking the ashes of his pipe overboard, and squinting into the bowl and leisurely stowing it away in his pocket, before removing his back from the forecabin rail, against which he had been lounging. Pipes watched

the man with his eyes full of fire, but did not speak. Presently the boat was lowered and brought to the gangway, the only one of the three who worked with the least show of will being Nipper. We shoved off, the men threw their oars out, and I steered the boat for the wreck, that the slewing of the *Silver Sea* had brought upon our starboard quarter. The sea was wonderful for the breathless calm on it. The water had the gleam of oil on its surface, and glancing along it from the low level of the boat, you saw a dozen tints lifting delicately out of the blue as if the faint swing of the swell that scarcely stirred the ship—though I could feel its long-drawn, tender pulsing now—raised layers of submerged dyes into the daylight : but when you peered over the gunwale, your gaze was buried in an emerald, profound, cool, luminous with a light of its own, reflective as a mirror, and raising in your mind fancies of the shell-covered mountains and valleys at bottom, the silent plains strown with the relics of green navies and the dead bodies of seamen of divers centuries undecomposed upon that tideless, unfretting, preserving bottom, and looking up through ten thousand fathoms of water as lifelike as though they lay dreaming on their backs in their hammocks. The Finn rowed stroke, and though the pull was a short one, I had time to furtively inspect his face sullenly working in the frame of his great head, and to mark how full of muscle the fellow's big, uncouth body was. Why, he appeared to have the making of two or three stout men in him, and might have proved as serviceable as a small ship's company, had he been as willing as he was able to work. He kept his eyes fixed full upon the *Silver Sea* we were leaving astern, with an amount of hard thinking in his gaze that apparently kept him insensible or unconscious of the sidelong notice I bestowed upon his singular features and powerful person. Past him was old Breechings's sulky red visage streaming with perspiration, and squinting doggedly at his oar as he raised and buried it. In the bow, Nipper pulled with a certain alacrity and an interest in what he was doing, as I could tell by the way he'd turn to see with what speed we neared the wreck.

The hull as we approached her disclosed the aspect of a powerful vessel probably twenty or thirty years old, coppered to the bends, with a very high side roughened with hollows like the skin after small-pox, or the inside of a muffin, the whole thickly covered with paint that was like pitch for coarseness. Both in build and appearance she reminded me of an old wooden man-of-war with her immensely thick cutwater and swelling quarters and breadth amidships. She was flush deck : a wide length of her starboard forecastle bulwarks was smashed level with the covering board ; what was left of her bowsprit was a mere jagged stump ; a quantity of standing rigging trailed over and streamed black and sinuously in the water ; on her stern and name-boards were painted in small letters the words *Lizzie Andrews*. She was as perfect a looking wreck in her way as pencil could draw or pen describe ; yet her

hull was still unquestionably tight and staunch, and it was certain that the cause of her primary abandonment was not because she was draining water into her, but, as I might suppose, because she had become a mere coffin for her crew through the destruction of her masts and swept decks, which had involved the loss of all her spare booms.

I headed the boat under her stern to pull round her. When her port side opened, there was a scared feeling in my heart, for the sight of this big, melancholy derelict made one expect God knows what wild things from her; but there was nothing to be seen here. The water lay soft as oil against her copper, that slid in a curve into it in a green trembling. Here, too, the davit falls were overhauled, the bulwarks broken in places, a raffle of gear overboard; but the other boat was not to be seen. I stood up and looked along the sea, thinking if she too had capsized, or had filled to the level of her gunwales, a glimpse of her might be caught in the glitter the wet on her would throw out to the sun. But it was all polished surface, with radiant tints sifting up through it, and nothing else. I was foolish to expect to see more, but somehow the circumstances of our having caught sight of one boat bottom upset me half-expecting to find the other floating near the wreck in a like condition. We got alongside, and I climbed on deck by means of the gear hanging to the water's edge, wondering, as I hauled myself up, how the ladies had managed to board this tall craft, that is, if they *had* boarded her, and supposing that the seamen had hoisted them up in bowlines. I called to Nipper to follow me, for I had no fancy for either Grondhal's or the cook's company, and yet I felt I ought not to be alone on the wreck either. He arrived hand over hand, and I told him to turn to and look about him narrowly for any bit of writing he might come across, or anything likely to furnish us with a clue to the time our people had remained aboard the hull, and to what had become of them.

I found myself on a broad, roomy deck, from which everything movable had been dashed. There was no galley, there was no long-boat, no booms, wheel, binnacle, companion. The main hatch was open, and I went to it and peered down, and perceived that the vessel had been freighted with coal, of which obviously a large portion had been jettisoned, though all trace of the grimy process had been washed clean away by the seas. If there was any water in her hold it was under the coal, and I could not see it. Nipper went forward and thoroughly examined the vessel that way, and I looked carefully round the after part of her, but there was nothing in the shape of a memorial of our people to be seen. There was no forecastle. The crew had evidently lodged in a deck-house, and that was gone, all that remained of it being the marks on the deck where the uprights and stanchions had been fixed.

Followed by the sailor, I descended the flight of steps that led to the cabin with a feeling of awe. I was pretty sure I should

discover nothing but an empty interior ; yet the mere sense that this wreck had been the theatre of great suffering, coupled with our dark uncertainty as to the fate of our friends and sailors who had boarded her, caused a thrill to pass through me as I went carefully down the steps through the hatch, from which the companion-cover had been washed away, leaving the aperture open. It was a large cabin, and through the stove skylights the blue air floated with light enough to show up the plain bulkheads, the frayed and worn carpet, the fragment of mizzenmast standing solid betwixt the ceiling and deck, the worn hair-cushioned lockers and the like. There were five berths, one of which had been a pantry, but it was as bare as the cupboard in the old nursery rhyme. There were bunks in the sleeping compartments, but no bedclothes nor matters of that kind. Indeed, the wreck below looked to be as clean swept as she was on deck ; and if her original crew had not carried away with them everything that was in her, then there was no question that she had been boarded by one or more vessels and rifled.

"I am afraid," said I, standing in the centre of the cabin and gazing around me, "that our poor shipmates and friends will have found little enough to eat here."

"And little enough to drink too," replied Nipper. "Wherever the fresh-water casks might have been stowed, there's nothing to be seen of them now. If they was got on deck to come at the cargo, they're overboard, I allow, along with a good many other things."

There was not a relic of the party to be seen ; nothing to assure us that they had passed the night aboard the wreck, that they had spent an hour in her, that they had even stepped on to her deck.

"What do you think has become of them ?" I asked Nipper.

"Why, sir," he answered, "my belief is the ladies got frightened when they saw the fog a-coming and begged to be rowed to the ship again ; and the mates, losin' their judgment or reckonin' that they could fetch the ship as fast as the fog, started to return, and were caught and swallowed up."

I doubted this, because, had the mates been as prompt to return to the *Silver Sea* as Nipper implied, they could undoubtedly have kept ahead of the fog long enough to enable us to see the boats approaching. The answer, coming as it did from a practical seaman of experience, merely proved that we found the matter to be a strange, wild riddle, not even to be solved by supposing that half the party had been drowned in the capsized boat we had come across, and that the others, unless their boat was capsized too, were drifting about within a few miles of us. Upon my word, the mere feeling that *that* might be the case, and that, could we point the ship's head aright, we might have the survivors safe with us with the first breeze that should tarnish the unspeakable polish that now made the deep like quicksilver reflecting the blue of the sky and the glory of the setting sun, was fairly maddening. There

was a fiery heat in the stagnant atmosphere of this empty cabin that parched our mouths and crusted our foreheads with drops of sweat. I went up out of it half-suffocated, calling out, "Come along, Nipper; there's nothing to be made of this hull. Whatever the secret is, she'll take it to the bottom with her." I went to the rail and looked over, and saw the boat under the mizzen chains with the cook and the Finn asleep in her. I sung out to them and they woke up, and as I dropped over the side Grondhal said to me, "Vell, is dere any news of de people?"

"No," I answered coldly.

"Are you goin' vidout setting fire to her?" said he.

"She ought to be burnt," remarked the cook. "'Twouldn't be acting like Christians to leave a lump like this here knocking about in the way of ships."

"Shtop! und ve'll hov a good fire to-night dot shall put out de moon!" cried the Finn, and after hurriedly feeling in his pockets for a lucifer match, as I suppose, he flung himself upon the gear, and hauled his huge and clumsy person up the side with singular agility, evidently in a state of high delight, and tumbling over the rail, disappeared. It was a gross liberty for the fellow to take; for the captain had placed me in charge of the boat, and the Finn should have asked my permission to quit her and fire the wreck before doing so; indeed I was so angry, and my dislike and fear of this hulking, mutinous foreigner was so great, that it would have given me great pleasure to row away and leave the villain to his fate. However, this was not to be done; so we waited for ten minutes, simmering betwixt the sun—that, low as he now was, shone with a scorching light—and the burning hot black side of the wreck; at the expiration of which time the Finn showed his extraordinary head above the bulwarks, and then came lurching and gripping and sliding down into the boat, seizing his oar with a mightyun pleasant grin, and roaring out to the cook and Nipper as though I were not present, "By Gott, my lads, she's hof full of coal. She'll make a fine shight."

"What did ye fire, Grondhal?" cried the cook.

"Vy, some bunk bottom plank I shplit—und some yarn and bits of canvas onder a bunk. Look! hurrah, bullies! dere comes der shmoke!" and with the glee of a boy, mixed up with a quality of spite, so to speak—of vindictive joy, as it were, in the destruction he had contrived—as though the wreck were something he detested and was wreaking his hate upon—that made his pleasure exceedingly disagreeable to witness, he pointed to a thin column of blue smoke that rose straight in the air out of the companion hatchway.

"Shove off!" I cried. Nipper did so, and the three men rowed leisurely towards the *Silver Sea*, the Finn watching the wreck with his face puckered by an expectant grin, and his eyes occasionally turning up aloft, evidently in chase of the smoke that mounted higher and higher as the flames gathered strength.

Our ship looked a beautiful object upon the calm, with the great sun like a flaming red shield sliding down a brassy wall sinking on the left of her. She took the full, rich light, and the glass-like bed on which she slept duplicated the picture of her with all her tints and streaks of fire and star-coloured canvas and the crimson sparks in her bends with the gold wire of her rigging, till there was something almost of gorgeousness in the splendid hues which the sinking luminary put into the fabric and the faintly-trembling but most exquisitely clear reflection under her. I could see Miss Inglefield and Pipes watching us from the quarter-deck, and a figure on the fore-castle-head ; but these signs of life were too small to give the ship the air of vitality you felt she ought to have ; she was like the picture of a craft on whose decks the artist had forgotten to paint in a crew ; she had a more solitary appearance than the wreck, a lonelier aspect for the very beauty of her ; and I remember that a heavy fit of depression fell upon me as we approached her, bred by thoughts of our missing friends and by the mightiness of the ocean whose despairful magnitude, lighted up by the solemn and expiring flames of the setting sun, one felt in a small open boat in a manner not to be described, and by the melancholy grace and silence and deserted look of the *Silver Sea*, and by indefinable misgivings as to the future.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LAST OF THE WRECK.

MISS INGLEFIELD ran eagerly up to me as I climbed over the side, and Pipes approached with a face full of anxiety. Before they could question me I exclaimed, "There is nothing on the wreck to tell what has become of the party. Her decks are clean swept, and there are the remains of a freight of coal in her hold. Her cabin is empty, there is no fore-castle, and if she were a balk of timber she couldn't be less suggestive of her own story, nor of the fate of our friends."

"Nothing to be seen of the boat, then?" said Pipes in a voice completely toned down, and with all his fierceness and mad manner gone out of him.

"Nothing," I replied. "And that," I continued, addressing Miss Inglefield, "we ought to consider hopeful. The whole of the people may be in her, and who's to know that they've not been picked up by some passing vessel by this time?"

"But no vessel has passed in this neighbourhood, Mr. Aubyn," she cried, with a sob in her voice.

"How can we be sure? Captain Pipes will tell you it needs but a few miles to hide a ship from us, and yet the ship that's out

reach of our sight might easily see the boat. I saw the smoke of a steamer this morning, as you know. It was a long way distant from the wreck when I spied it, but for all that the steamer might have passed close enough to make out the people aboard of the hull and take them off."

"That would not account for the upset boat," she said.

I looked at Pipes, wishing he would lend me a hand to soothe the girl; for between us we might have made a very great deal of the smoke I had seen in the morning, though secretly I considered with Miss Inglefield that the capsized boat indicated a disaster that forbade one from laying much hope on the steamer that was clearly some miles away from the wreck when I caught sight of her smoke; but the old fellow stared at the hull without speaking, though in a few moments he turned to me and said, "I see you set her on fire before leaving, sir."

"No," said I, "it was Grondhal who did that;" and remembering the Finn's behaviour with a good deal of resentment, I told him how the fellow had climbed aboard the wreck without asking my leave, and described the uncomfortable delight he took in his destructive project. Once again the mad kind of fire flashed into Pipes's eyes as he turned them upon Grondhal, who, with the others, was securing the boat at the davits, and I saw his hand go to his breast that was bulged out by something harder and fuller than a pocket-handkerchief. He eyed him steadfastly for some moments, but said nothing, and after casting his glance round the breathless sea-line, he exclaimed, "We're in for a quiet night, I think; quieter than one's feelings are likely to relish. Hadn't you better go below and get something to eat? You'll find some cold grub and bread. And you might take the young lady with you, Mr. Aubyn, for she must be pretty near starving. The biscuit you brought her at lunch-time is all she's had to eat since breakfast."

I was pretty hungry myself, and gladly escorted Miss Inglefield below, where I found much the same sort of fare on the table as had been put upon it for lunch. I pressed the poor girl to eat, and talked cheerfully to her, telling her that in spite of the capsized boat, nothing should induce me to doubt that the whole party had in some manner come off with their lives and were now in safety, because when I came to reflect, it seemed unlikely that Hornby or Edwards could have prevailed upon the mates to take to the boats and leave the wreck which the sailors would know was tight and sound, and on board which they would be anxious to stop in the conviction that Pipes would go on beating about until he had found her; unless by so doing they could the more speedily insure their deliverance. But the upset boat was Miss Agnes's stumbling-block. It was like a rock in the road of my theories, which went to pieces against it.

"It *must* mean that those who were in her were drowned," said

she, with a long, tremulous sigh, that seemed to extinguish the light of the pretty smile she had put on to listen with as a kind of thanks to me for striving to cheer her ; " but I will try hard to hope with you that all may be well. We shall not know until we get home, and perhaps not until long after. . . . Oh, it will be a dreadful time of suspense. . . . I pray that God may be merciful and spare them, for without my parents I shall—I shall——" She broke down utterly, burying her face and sobbing in a manner that was like to rend her tender, delicate frame.

I was so much moved that I believe I played a fonder and more caressing part with her than I was perfectly conscious of. I well recollect taking her hand and bringing her close to me, whilst I bent my lips to her ear and encouraged her by anything I could think of to say. Indeed, had I been asked then if I was in love with her, I should have answered yes ; her sobs, her childlike way of implying that without her parents she would be alone, and friendless, and helpless—for all that was conveyed in her broken " without my parents I shall—I shall——" the new and appealing prettiness the pathos of her posture and grief gave to her, her half-nestling manner when I drew her to me, as though it was tender kindness and gentle soothing caressing that she needed now, were influences of a strong kind. Presently I had her somewhat tranquil. The scarlet faintness of light in the cabin let me know that the sun's disc had vanished ; it was oppressively hot, and the ship lay as still as if she were moored alongside a wharf. We returned on deck, and looking into the west I saw the sky low down of a throbbing red, like an ocean of molten iron newly run, with layers of pink and yellow above it, and then a delicate green sky merging into a lovely darkly-pure blue, though in the east the heavens caught the lingering western splendour and gave it back in a soft orange. Under the fast fading glory left by the vanished sun lay the breathless, burnished sea, and every hue of the sky there was so perfectly reflected in it that it was as though another vast portion of the sunset below the horizon was shining through the crystal of that stirless convexity of water. In the south-east or thereabouts, half a mile distant, stood the wreck under a dense black canopy of smoke, that overhung her like a thundercloud. There was not the faintest breathing in the atmosphere to disturb the fat, sooty vapour that rose as perpendicularly as a ship's mast from the hull to a certain height, where it spread thickening upwards and outwards, and stretching its midnight bulk fairly on all sides, so that the wreck as nearly as possible centred it ; and she lay dark under its shadow, with now and again a flash of red leaping up and falling back in a dull reflection off the inky, sluggish mass that glared yellow for a breath to the instant's blaze ; whilst the sea hung brown to the confines of the black reflection, when it became an indigo blue, but with *something of the ashen tinge of night creeping like an atmosphere over it out of the east, as the tropical splendours died quickly*

leaving no space for twilight betwixt their extinction and the onward-rolling gloom.

There was a moon over our mastheads. The clouds of the preceding night had obscured her then, but now as the daylight died off air and sea, her silver took the glorious white brightness that you must penetrate equatorial latitudes to behold, and her reflection plumbed the still and silent deep like a shaft of sparkling frost, whilst aloft our canvas stole out into the glooming air as though they were squares of ivory, the decks whitened, shadows of jet crept out from the mastcoats and under the shrouds, the sea ran grey and glistening into the east, and as if by magic the last lingering bit of dim hectic in the west faded, and the night was all around with the bright moon shining in the midst of it, and stars green and yellow and blue, sparkling richly and thickly clear of the orb's misty, luminous, circumjacent atmosphere, and flashing like wheels of white fire upon the horizon. But right abeam of us, south-east, as the ship had swung, a big space of sky was blackened by the smoke of the wreck. At intervals a rush of red fire soared wildly, and seemed to leap sheer into the huge motionless cloud and vanish there. The effects of these bursts of flame, now that the darkness had come down, was startling. They might have passed for a dreadful kind of lightning; they threw out a wide circumference of sea in a dull crimson, and for a breathless moment dyed the dense body of vapour a blood-red, whilst they caused shadows to leap upon our decks; and they tinged the edges of the sails with scarlet, which made the ship, steeped in moonlight, look wonderful for colour.

Though the Finn had acted mutinously and insolently in setting fire to the wreck without my leave, yet when I cast my gaze round the shadowy sea, I thought it was a good thing to happen, after all: for if our surviving boat should be within sight of the glare the hull would presently throw upon the sky—and that would be a light visible for leagues and leagues—her occupants might struggle to make for the spot, guessing that the flame came from the wreck, and that the ship that had destroyed her—unless she were a steamer—would be becalmed in the neighbourhood; and even though nothing should follow in that way, still it was proper that the derelict should be burnt, as she was as dangerous as an island to navigation, and moreover accurst to us as the cause of the grief and anxiety we were now enduring.

I was looking at her with Miss Inglefield, always trying to console the poor girl by any hopeful fancies that entered my head, when Pipes suddenly called out to some one moving in the waist to tell the men who were forward to lay aft; he then put his face to the open skylight and sung out for the steward to come on deck. The ordinary seaman Eye had been at the wheel when I rowed over to the wreck; he was now relieved by Nipper, though it was idle and useless work enough standing at the helm, since the ship was as

still as though the ocean were glass and she were lodged in a cutting in it that fitted her frame. The men speedily assembled, being rendered nimble by curiosity. They stood—the five of them—a little forward of the foremost skylight, clear of the ink-like tracery of the rigging on the deck, so that the bright moon poured full upon them betwixt the main and mizzen-masts, giving them each a short, sharp, black shadow, and turning their faces white as stone, whilst it left their eyes dark with a curious glistening in them. But by this time the ruddy leapings aboard the wreck were growing greater and rising fiercer and faster, and often the sullen crimson would flash upon us all, making twin shadows with the moonshine everywhere, and putting a hectic into the men's cheeks turned that way, and a flush upon their bare arms and rough clothes that made the group resemble something one has dreamt of rather than seen.

Pipes approached the men, and clearing his throat said: "What's become of our friends and shipmates we can't tell. It's to be hoped and prayed for, my lads, that the capsized boat we came across away out yonder this afternoon don't mean what she looks to signify. This bad business is a blow to me—the worst blow that ever came upon me in all the years I've passed at sea." His voice faltered. "It's enough to turn a man's brain"—he paused again, pulled off his cap and pressed his hand to his forehead, and in the clear moonlight one saw him staring slowly round and looking out to sea in a perfectly dazed manner; but in a moment or two he rallied and went on: "I've done what I could anyhow. You're all there to witness to that. And now I've called you aft to tell you that it's my intention to sail this ship back to England. There are six of you; there's Mr. Aubyn here, who I am sure'll be willing to lend a hand; that's seven; then there's me, making eight. So now, men, as you know which way we shall be bound when the wind comes along, there's nothing more to do except divide ye into watches; and that'll be arranged thus: Nipper, Eye, and the under-steward'll make the starboard watch the others'll be in the port watch. Mr. Aubyn, I shall have to call upon you, sir, to keep a look-out and help me in that way in fine weather, or when the ship don't want close nautical watching. It wouldn't be right to put a mate's duty upon you; for though, certainly, you know the ropes to an extent, you don't set up for a sailor fit to have charge of the deck when real sailorly qualities are needed."

"Assuredly not," said I; "but you may depend upon my doing the utmost in my power to help you to navigate this vessel home, and you may reckon upon my obedience to your commands as completely as if I had signed articles under you."

I had noticed the men look at one another when Pipes spoke of sailing the ship to England. When I had ended my little speech *there was a pause*. The steward made a move as if to step aft, *but the others stood still*. The stirlessness everywhere made the

scene at that moment so much like a painted picture that it persistently takes that character to my recollection. There was the breathless ocean drawing up out of the distant dimness to the ship in a surface like that of a summer lake, not a respiration in it to broaden the beauty of the mirrored starlight, nor to distort the clear, silver edges of the flood of white light under the moon; the wreck burnt fitfully, now and again emitting a red flash which the water returned in a wild throb of crimson that might have passed for the early dartings of a submarine volcano; not a shadow slid upon the decks that wore the gleam of ivory; here and there there was a pearly glitter when the moonbeams struck the brass-work; overhead the silence was like that among the leaves of a tall tree in a quiet night in June. It perplexed the mind to associate all this with the great equatorial heart of the mighty Atlantic oceans. A jar of the wheel chains, the sob of water, the least sounds of chafing among the rigging, the clank of a topsail sheet, might have defined our situation to the imagination. But the scene was as still as the grave when our voices were hushed, and with one's eyes shut it would have been as easy to imagine that the ship was floating a mile high in the indigo moonlit atmosphere, as that her keel was submerged in waters one thinks of as sleepless.

"You can go forward, men," said Pipes.

The Finn came from among the others by a long stride, and exclaimed, "Beg pardon, shkipper, did you shay you should sail dis ship to Englandt?"

"You heard me plain enough," rejoined Pipes.

"I don't shee how it's to be done," said the Finn, wagging his head till the reflection of it on the deck resembled a pool of ink quivering and throbbing as though its margin must overflow in a dozen parts of it before long.

"That's my business," exclaimed Pipes.

"There's but dree shailors, shkipper," continued the Finn with a tone of dogged sullenness coming into his coarse, unpleasant voice, "and dis here craft's not to be shailed all der vay to England by dem alone. Ve'll carry her to Pernambuco, und das ish ash fur ash ve are fit to go."

I knew by Pipes's manner and the shake in his notes that he was having a fierce struggle with his temper. He made two or three efforts to speak, and then, in a voice that literally vibrated in the ear like the rumbling bass of an organ, he said, "I intend to sail this ship to England. If you don't turn to with the others it'll mean because I shall send a bullet through your head; for by the living God I'll shoot you down like the mutinous, skulking, ungrateful hound that you are on your refusal of the first order I give you. So now go forward." And as he said this he lifted his hand to *his breast*. The Finn instantly turned and went towards the fore-castle, and the others followed him in silence.

And this, thought I, as I stood with Miss Inglefield's hand

trembling on my arm, is what Edwards's voyage in search of health and for the sake of pleasure has ended in! The greater portion of guests and crew drowned or drifting about starving in an open boat, and of the rest of them some in a state of mutiny, the captain walking about with a loaded revolver in his bosom, and the two guests wondering what is to become of them, and whether they will ever behold their native land again!

"What will happen next, Mr. Aubyn?" asked Miss Inglefield in a whisper full of alarm. "I am sure Captain Pipes will end in shooting that dreadful Finn."

"I wish he would," said I, "for if he don't, I am very much afraid the Finn will shoot him."

"What was the place the man said he would be willing to help Captain Pipes to sail the ship to?"

"Pernambuco."

"Is that far off?"

"A tidy distance; but very much nearer than England—within a few days' sail with a good breeze."

"Wouldn't it be better for us to steer to that place?" It is fearful to be confined in this ship with such a wicked, horrid character as the Finn. We could easily get home from Pernambuco, I am sure, and at all events we should be safe on land there, and out of the *Silver Sea*; and oh, Mr. Aubyn," she cried, turning up her pale face which the moonlight made as white as alabaster, whilst she locked her quivering fingers upon my arm, "*do* beg and implore Captain Pipes to steer us to that place, for I am certain if he persists in sailing to England something dreadful will happen."

"I may try him presently, but not yet," I replied. "He's in a dangerous temper, and in my opinion not in sound mind, though he is recovering. I might stand, for all I know, to get one of his bullets through my own brain were I to give him to imagine I was on the Finn's side by urging him to head for Pernambuco."

He had been standing all this while in a fixed posture gazing forward where the men had gone. Presently his hand fell from his breast and he gave a deep sigh, and walked aft to the grating abaft the wheel with his head bent down, and there he remained for some moments apparently scanning the weather, after which he marched straight up to Miss Inglefield and me.

"It's a bad job, Mr. Aubyn," said he, "that ever we picked up that Finn. But I don't know that we need take much notice of his mutineering conduct, for he's an arrant cur, and I've made him understand that I'll not spare him if he provokes me. I'm truly sorry," he continued, addressing Miss Agnes, "that a young lady like you should witness scenes such as that there Finn brings about; but there's more splutter than meaning in 'em. There's *nothing that need alarm ye.*"

I was not a little pleased to find him talking respectfully and

considerately to us again, though I was struck by the heavy depression that weighed down in his voice.

"All will come right, captain, let us hope," said I cheerfully. "There's unquestionably enough of us to carry this ship in safety to England, and, please God, we'll do it. As to our fellow-passengers and the men——"

"Don't let's talk about 'em, sir," he interrupted mildly, yet with a sudden convulsive clasp of his hands.

"Oh, but I want so much to know what you think, Captain Pipes," cried Miss Agnes eagerly, emboldened by this return to his old manner. "I have not liked to ask you before, but will you not tell me now," she continued, with her voice sinking in a long tremble, "if I may dare hope to ever meet my dear parents again?"

His face was to the moonlight, and just at that moment a great mass of fire was belched up out of the wreck, the radiance of which was so powerful that whilst it lasted the sheen of the luminary was dimmed by it; and by this mingled illumination I saw him looking steadfastly at the girl with an expression so singular that I felt certain the old fellow was to be easily and quickly driven utterly mad by questioning him about his passengers and seamen, and forcing his attention upon the subject. Startled somewhat, I said hurriedly, "Miss Inglefield, we ought not to trouble Captain Pipes. Like ourselves, he can only hope for the best. He knows no more than we do." And as I spoke I pressed her arm that she might understand me. "Captain, I'm going to take the liberty of offering a suggestion. You have had an anxious time of it, and have taken no rest. The night is amazingly fine and quiet. Will you now go and turn in for three or four hours, and trust to me to call you if a breeze comes or any change takes place?"

He removed his eyes from Miss Inglefield and turned them slowly round the sea.

"Well, Mr. Aubyn," he said, preserving his subdued manner and speaking as though grieving bitterly and half broken down by his feelings, "I dare say a nap will do me good. There's not much of a look-out needed. We're too far off from that blaze to fear it. If you'll let me lie till ten I shall be thankful. Should any air come along you'll call me that I may trim the yards."

"Without fail."

"And meanwhile you can take a look round th' horizon from time to time with the night-glass. There's no saying what may heave in sight."

So speaking, and after another uncertain pause, he walked slowly to the hatch; but even there he lingered so long, with his hands upon the companion, staring in the direction of the wreck, that I believed he meant to give up the notion of going below. At last *he disappeared.*

"Until his mind has returned to its old groove," said I to Miss

Agnes, "it will be safest not to refer in his presence to the sorrowful business of the wreck."

"He stared at me very strangely," said she.

"Yes," I answered; "it's the one subject over which his intellect capsize if you put it in the road of it. Poor old man! there must have been a deal of desperate worry and grief going on in him to account for his behaviour. The wreck begins to burn fiercely now, Miss Inglefield."

The exclamation was forced from me by the upleaping of a grand mass of flame that, instead of sinking as before, grew momentarily fiercer. We knew that no life was imperilled by the ruddy, savage soaring that wounded the blackness over it with a blood-red gash; we knew that the destruction of the wreck was a commendable thing in the interests of navigation; and yet for all that the fire, now grown furious, took such an element of terror, that for a long time in watching it I was sensible of a kind of awe and fear, and we stood, my companion and I, gazing at it without speaking a word. It was the sense of the tremendous solitude of the ocean that made the burning hull a terrible sight; the accentuation it gave to one's thought of the misery, the despair, the maddening mental anguish suffered by people left helpless on board a ship on fire in the middle of the mighty deep. The flames flared and flashed into the dense pall of smoke, and illuminated it like a vast thundercloud luridly tinged by the expiring sullen scarlet of an ominous stormy sunset. The astonishing placidity of the sea was a mirror for the fire, too; and the light of the flames seemed to broaden out for miles upon the stirless surface, spreading with the fierce, brilliant incandescence of molten ore from under the shadow of the wreck, and gradually thinning into orange till it melted in the black of the sea, where the starlight was hanging in points like snowflakes. We were close enough to hear the hissing and rending noises in the hull, which were often varied by explosions, which came booming along the smooth surface as though the wreck had been mounted with loaded guns which the heat was discharging; and such was often the fury and power of that fire that the light of it would master the moonshine upon our decks and sails, overwhelm the shadows made by the planet, and throw out the black reflections of its own upon planks and canvas it had died scarlet.

On a sudden, however, and after the hull had been blazing in this fashion for about three-quarters of an hour, a sound of seething such as breakers might make in a storm came from her, and the mass of fire dwindled; and then one saw the red-hot fabric lean suddenly to port and founder, extinguishing the tremendous light so abruptly that one's eyes looked blindly against the very moonshine.

"Peace be with her!" said I: "but would to God somebody had thought proper to burn her long ago. Never, I dare say, could any vessel have been more fruitful of trouble than she was."

My companion drew a long, tremulous sigh, and turned her eyes up to the moon as though to soothe herself with a glance at the bland and beautiful orb after the red and savage picture we had been contemplating. The smoke lay dense in the south-east, hanging about twice the height of our mastheads over the water that stood like ink under it. I looked around for a blurr on the burnished surface, and then dropped my companion's arm to fetch the night-glass, with which I carefully swept the horizon. But the circle came bare under the stars to the showering haze of the moonlight. Well, it was only nine o'clock, too early for Miss Inglefield to go to bed. I called softly to the steward through the skylight to bring us some supper on a tray ; and after we had taken a bite, I lighted a cigar and put the girl's hand under my arm again, and strolled quietly about the decks ; for it was a glorious night indeed ; the dew cooled the atmosphere ; the silence aloft and upon the water was exquisitely soothing, and the firmament was so shining and majestic with the light of moon and stars that I could notice the grief Miss Agnes had in her heart melting out of her eyes as she cast them upwards, bringing me to a stand, and gazing with the steadfastness of a statue at the multitudinous sparkling and the floating gold-dust of flying meteors.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WE LOSE THE CAPTAIN.

MISS INGLESFIELD went below at half-past nine. I handed her to the companion, and then through the skylight I saw her standing for some moments at the cabin table, looking round her as though oppressed yet again by the silence of this interior and its emptiness. Something in this pause of hers affected me greatly. I had felt her loneliness before ; but it had taken the heaviest accentuation it could receive, now that we had encountered the capsized boat to build a hundred fears upon, and now that we had sighted and overhauled the wreck and found her empty and mute as death as to the fate of those who had boarded her yesterday.

I went to the rail and looked away up the brilliant wake of moonshine to where, through the silvery haze, the horizon trembled in a fibre like a silken thread, and, pipe in mouth, I leaned smoking and thinking. It was the dark water on either side the stream of moonlight, black as ink from the contrast, yet agleam, too, in some mystical fashion, with the tremulous touching of starlight, that set me dreaming about Margaret Edwards, maybe by causing me to *think of her dark, beautiful, luminous eyes ; anyhow she and Agnes Inglefield came pairing into my fancies ; but when I asked myself which of the two I would rather have with me now, my humour*

chose Agnes. The other would have made a noble and stately companion, she would have borne her troubles without a sigh, and so far as I was concerned, there would have been the magic of her singular beauty to fill out and illumine every hour and to furnish a very pretty consolation to our dilemma. But she would not have drawn to me as Agnes Inglefield had. There would have been no trembling claspings of my arm, no eager, child-like questioning with the eyes, none of the score of half-girlish, half-womanly touches of sweet dependence and timid reliance with which a girl can make a man feel proud of being strong and resolute and self-helpful. If I knew anything of Margaret at all, just the opposite would have been the case with her. The heroic qualities would have been too strong in her to make me sensible of any that I myself might possess. Too courageous to require soothing, too clear-sighted to need the ideas of others, too calm to give me a chance with her emotions, she would, morally speaking, have kept me at arm's length, and if I should have fallen in love with her, in all probability I should have found her as cold and insensible as stone, when on the other hand, with her father and our friends on board, she might at least have condescended to smile amiably upon my efforts to reach her heart.

And was I in this making the best of what had happened and for which there was no help? What I *do* know is, that when I got thinking how Margaret Edwards might have been in the capsized boat, I gave a start that shook all soft and sentimental thoughts of either girl out of my head clean overboard, and it was with feelings such as come to you when you gaze on some lovely spot made horrible to the imagination by the bloody murder that happened there, that I sent my eye along the surface of brilliant pearl which ran under the moon like a shining road, upon the sea leading to the distant heavens and thought that, for all I knew, *there*, close under that flashing expanse, might be floating the body of the beautiful girl!

It was a fancy to put a ghastliness into the night, fair and radiant as it was, and imaginary as the sensation must have been, yet I felt a chill come off the waters where they lay glooming with no other light upon them but what dropped from the planets that made me shiver again, and I quitted the rail to give my mind to the ship and block out the ugly fancies which were swarming upon me. I walked to the binnacle and found Eye at the wheel: that is to say, he was sitting on the grating which hid the tiller and wheel-chains; he did not rise when I approached, a piece of behaviour I thought extremely insulting and offensive, though even had I desired to resent it, I could not have found a good excuse to do so, as I was no officer of his, and had nothing to do with the ship and the work of the ship. The vessel lay with her head to the *west*; *there was not the least perceptible movement of the compass-card*: the wheel-chains were as still as a coil of rope upon a

belaying-pin. Taking no notice of the ordinary seaman, I walked a short distance forward and stood looking at the sails glimmering up astern into the gloom, with the tops of the yards as pale in the moonshine as though instead of being black they had been painted a faint green; the moonlight gushed its rain of brilliance under the foot of the canvas, and every portion of rope it touched was changed into silver wire, leaving lengths of the rigging dark in shadow; and you could see the clear, crystalline light glittering in quicksilver along the dew upon the rails, and making the decks look as though they were inlaid with ebony carvings of the starboard quarter-boat, the shrouds fore and aft, short heights of the masts, the long-boat forward, and everything that was raised and could cast a shadow within the bulwarks. Oh, it was beautiful exceedingly, but sad, too bitterly sad somehow to my mood. No sound fell from aloft, no moan of air came over the rail, there was no pulsation in the deep to induce a sense of life. The yards were square, and the mainsail hauled up and the spanker brailled in; otherwise the ship lay under all plain sail. A low humming of voices came from forward, and I could just make out a couple of figures standing near the port cathead where the moon threw down the black shadow of the fore topmost staysail upon them. I fancied I could distinguish the towering frame of the Finn. If it were he then it was his watch below; but there would be nothing unreasonable in the man quitting the hot fore-castle for a lounge and a smoke in the cool night air, particularly as he might suppose the calm would last all night, and that there would be plenty of time therefore for him to get as much sleep as he wanted before sunrise.

It was past ten o'clock; about the quarter, I think; and still I delayed going below to call Pipes, desiring that the poor old fellow should go on resting; when, happening to cast my eyes towards the cloud of smoke, that had not in all that time probably shifted its position by fifty feet from where it had gathered over the sea where the wreck had foundered, I observed that it was in motion, and that it had changed its form, and that it was floating very slowly athwart the stars towards the moon, that is to say, towards the north. Looking into the south, I saw the first of a light breeze coming along, ruling a straight line that was discernible by all behind it being ruffled starlight, whilst before it the reflections hung with an amazing summer tranquillity in the breathless water.

I hastened below to call Pipes, for here was wind approaching, and the yards would require trimming, and the ship got to a course. I stepped over to his cabin and knocked, and he instantly answered, "Come in." On opening the door I was not a little surprised to see him seated at a small table, for I had expected to find him in his bunk. A plated swinging lamp screwed to the bulkhead illuminated the berth, and I could not fail to notice that in whatever posture *Pipes* might have been in when I knocked, he had certainly not been

sleeping. The table was bare, and the old man's arms lay upon it as though he had been leaning his head on his hands, and had dropped them when I opened the door.

"What is it, Mr. Aubyn?" he exclaimed, with a startled look at me which impressed me at the time as I well remember.

"There's a light breeze blowing, captain."

"Is there, though?" he cried, jumping up and glancing about him for his cap, which lay on the deck under the table, and which I picked up and handed to him. "What's the hour?"

I told him.

"Eh?" he muttered; "well, thinking makes the minutes fly, anyhow;" and so saying he walked quickly out of his cabin and ran on deck.

I followed him. The wind had come up to the vessel, and was blowing very lightly between the masts. Pipes went to the binnacle and ordered the helm to be shifted. He gave no directions to man the braces, and I could not understand his silence; until presently we had the moon on our port hand and the breeze right astern, on which he told Eye to steady the helm. This was sailing the ship along a northerly course, for England, indeed, as he had informed the men he intended to head her: and the yards being square, the mainsail hauled up and the spanker in the brails, there was nothing for the watch to do.

I lingered awhile to enjoy the coolness of the breeze and to mark what progress the ship made before it. It heartened me up to think that we were going home. The voyage had become a miserable, tragical business, and so far as I was concerned it could not now too speedily end. I leaned over the rail watching the ripples opening from the bows breaking into lines like silver wire as they ran towards the moon, and was thinking with deep sorrow of our friends, and wondering if we were ever likely to hear of them again, and what sort of fate had befallen them, when all on a sudden the ship was plunged in deep shadow, and glancing at the sky I observed that the moon had been as completely obscured by the body of smoke driven by the wind over it as if its light had been intercepted by a thundercloud. The incident was extremely trivial; yet this darkness falling upon the ship with a suddenness startling in its way—for one never dreamt of anything of that kind happening in a cloudless sky—coupled with the gloom—the extinction of the white sparkling that was turning all that it shone upon into gleaming pearl and ivory—coming at a moment when I was lost in thought over our friends and the voyage that yet lay before us, affected me strangely, and it was with a positive feeling of relief that I watched the low-sailing, fat, and sooty mass of vapour go clear of the beautiful orb and leave our ship dreamlike and radiant again under her beams.

I crossed over to Pipes, who stood stock still looking along the hip with his hand upon the port vang.

"I hope, captain," said I, "you'll think proper to call me whenever you have a mind to lie down. You can count on me rousing you should the weather change or the vessel require attention. And I must be a lubber indeed," said I, "if on such a night as this I am not fit to keep a look-out."

"Oh, you're very good, Mr. Aubyn," he answered in the most despondent tone imaginable. "Should I feel to need a nap I'll call you, you may depend upon it."

"You'll need it before the night's out," said I, touched by his broken-down manner. "I had hoped to find you turned in when I knocked on your door just now."

"I can't sleep, sir," he interrupted. "My mind's too excited. What's happened is too dreadful. It keeps my brain in a whirl, and there's no rest for me for thinking of it. But I dare say I'll calm down afore long," said he, passing his hand over his eyes.

"Why should you infer the worst, though, captain? It is quite true that we came across one of the boats capsized; but isn't the other big enough to hold them all? and if so, why should we deny ourselves the benefit of the hope that on our arrival at home we shall hear that the whole party were picked up?"

He shook his head, and exclaimed in low, broken tones, "They'll never be heard of more—one boat capsized—we know that for certain. If the other's afloat, where is she? There were sailors enough among the party to know pretty well on what quarter we should heave in sight when ratching about to get the wreck in view, and they'd be sure to keep the boat's head for that quarter as near as they could judge by the sun—if they waited for the dawn to put off from the hull; and what I say is, I don't doubt the worst has happened, not only from our meeting with the upset boat, but because there's no sign of the other;" and I noticed him by the clear moonlight cast a sort of mechanical, vacant glance along the sea-line on the port side.

I was not a sailor, like this man; yet, though I was not at all hopeful of the fate of our friends, I felt that Pipes took but a very narrow view of the matter. He gave them no chances whatever. Because one boat was capsized he concluded the other boat was also lost; whereas, as I have said, that boat might be afloat with the whole party in her; and if we could make up our minds to believe them alive, we had a good right to hope that they would be seen by a ship and rescued.

"At all events, captain," said I, "we oughtn't to allow our fears that the other boat has capsized or sunk also to prevent us from keeping a bright look-out for her."

"That you can leave to me, sir," he exclaimed quickly and warmly, evidently resenting the suggestion.

"And do you think if we were to pass a day or two in searching *these waters*?—for if the boat's afloat she can't be very far off—one *might almost* calculate her distance indeed."

"Search!" he cried. "In which direction would you search? there's only one place to look for 'em in, and that's down there!" pointing with his pale forefinger over the side. "They're not afloat! they're not afloat!" he said hoarsely, with a look towards the man at the wheel. "Don't offer me any more advice, Mr. Aubyn. I'm too ill to listen to it—too ill, sir;" and he walked away from me to abreast of the port quarter-boat, and seated himself on a hencoop there, where he pulled off his cap to wipe his brow, and then restlessly rose again and crossed the deck, and stared away out to sea and then aloft.

The best thing to be done with a person in his state of mind is to leave him alone, yet still I paused before going below, for the breeze seemed to have deepened the loveliness of the night, giving a darker purity to the indigo of the sky, a sharper lustre to the white and greenish fires of the stars, and a keener brilliance to the moonbeams, now tremulous along the whole length of the glorious reflection in the water, as the light there was broken by the mild running of the ripples. Then the dew, too, would fall from the flapping canvas and softly patter upon the decks in little showers. Our speed was slow, barely three miles an hour, yet still there was movement, and there were eddies and bubbles of fire to watch launching out in sparkles from the deep shadow of the counter; whilst after the stagnation of the afternoon it was pleasant to behold even the faint fluttering of the dog-vane on the rail, and listen to the chafing of the foot of the sails lifting off the stays and then sliding back as they came into the mast. I took a long look round with my mind full of the boat and of Pipes's dismal notions about the fate of our friends and his unfortunate despondency and eccentricity of temper and behaviour, and by this time feeling somewhat drowsy—it was now eleven o'clock—I went down the companion ladder to my berth.

I had no sooner undressed myself, however, and put my head upon the pillow when the drowsiness passed away. To begin with, it was extremely hot, almost unbearably so. The scuttle was open, but then the wind was right aft, and I could not feel a breath of air come through the aperture. Then again, I got thinking about matters very well calculated to keep a man wakeful—the passage home; what sort of job we should make of the working of the ship with our small and discontented crew; Pipes's conduct, and whether he was likely to develop symptoms that would render him unfit to have charge of the ship; and if so, what we should do, for I knew nothing whatever of navigation, and it was not to be supposed that any man forward could use a sextant. These and twenty other thoughts relating to our situation, to Miss Agnes, to our missing friends, came in the wake of the heat to keep me in a fever; and it must have been past twelve when I finally fell asleep, my last recollected thought being whether Pipes would have the good sense to arouse me in order to get some rest for him-

self, and stop, by slumber, the simmering of his poor old worried brain.

I was disturbed by my name being called. My berth was in darkness, but there was a light in the cabin, and against that background I saw a figure standing in the doorway. I was but half awake, and asked drowsily who that was.

"The steward," was the answer.

"What's the matter?" said I, sitting up. "Does the captain want me to relieve him?"

"I've come to tell you," replied the steward, "that we can't find the captain nowhere. We've searched for him high and low, and the fear is that he's thrown himself overboard."

This found me broad awake in a breath. I sprang out of my bunk and clothed myself rapidly, whilst I plied the steward with questions. "What time is it?"

"About a quarter past one, sir."

"When was the captain last seen?"

"Why, at about a quarter to one o'clock."

"Where, man, where?"

"On the quarter-deck, certainly. The Finn was at the wheel. He asked the captain's leave to go forward. The captain gave leave and took the helm whilst the Finn went. When the Finn came back, the wheel was deserted and the captain gone."

"Gone where?"

"Why, that's it, sir."

I paused a moment. The night was still very quiet; the ship perfectly steady; through the dark orifice of the open scuttle no sound came, save the tinkling noise of the little ripples thrown backwards from the gently-pushing stem and washing along the vessel's sides.

"Do you mean to tell me," I said, "that if the captain had thrown himself overboard, the splash made by his body would not have been heard?"

"Heard by who?"

"By whoever was awake."

"Well, sir, me and the cook was asleep to begin with; we lay close against the long-boat, for we reckoned that to be all the look-out that was necessary in weather of this kind. We heard no splash. Grondhal, he says he went into the fore-castle, and was there about five minutes. If the captain chucked himself overboard *then*, it's not likely the Finn would have heard him."

I could not doubt from the man's voice and manner that he honestly believed that Pipes had made away with himself; and when I recalled the old fellow's heavy depression, his singular behaviour, how he had allowed the loss of his passengers and men to *pray upon* his mind, the misgiving that he might have committed suicide became a conviction, and half wild with agitation—*for if Pipes were gone, what was to become of the ship? how were*

we to find our way across the sea?—I pushed past the steward and ran up the companion ladder.

There had been no change in the weather since I left the deck. The light breeze was blowing astern, the heavens were clear and brilliant with stars from sea-line to sea-line, here and there upon the waters a little space of phosphorus flashed fitfully; but the beautiful crystal moonshine had drawn off, and the orb hung red, waning in the west with a pinkish trickling reflection under her that, quiet and fine as the night was, gave the ocean that way a wild look. Spite of the stars, therefore, the gloom was deep; the ocean seemed to have blackened, and to have hove its shadow into the atmosphere; the ship was a dark outline with her sails spreading out wan to the stars; but whatever stood against the luminaries sparkling white low down over the sea, came out in a sharp configuration; one saw the quarter-boats, the lower portion of the shrouds with the stars betwixt the squares of the ratlines, and the like all very plain, and nothing to my sight was distincter than the form of the Finn gripping the wheel, with his head and body down to the waist towering a clear outline against the fine dusk beyond the taffrail.

There were some figures talking together just before the main-mast; when I arrived on deck they came aft. They were the two seamen, the cook and the under-steward, so that the Finn being at the wheel and the steward by my side, everybody, with the exception of Miss Agnes, had turned out. I was about to step up to Grondhal when these men came about me; I exclaimed, "I say, men, the steward tells me your captain's missing. If that's so, no worse job could have happened. Have you searched everywhere for him?"

"Everywhere, sir," said Nipper.

"In his cabin?"

"Ay, and in all the empty cabins likewise," exclaimed the steward. "The completest search was made before you was called. We've looked into the quarter-boats, we have overhauled the half-deck, the long-boat, wherever there was a hole for a man to hide himself in, for there's no harm now in saying that when we was all roused up and understood that Captain Pipes was a-missing, we agreed that the loss of his two boats and the people in 'em had disordered his intellects, and so we sarched about as we would for a man who'd act as a hinfant, and conceal himself there's no telling in what queer place."

"There's no denying that his head was touched by the loss of his passengers and crew," said Nipper.

"I said all along he'd fallen daft," remarked Eye.

"Daft ain't the word," said the cook. "I've watched him from the galley door stan'in' and muttering to himself for half an hour at a stretch, and castin' sidelong looks at the sea, as though he was only waiting for a chance to chuck himself over the side."

"Is that what you all think he has done?" I exclaimed.

"Why, yes," answered the cook ; "if he wasn't over the side he'd be aboard, and he ain't aboard, I'll swear."

"He's committed suicide and drowned hisself," said Eye.

"Yes, he has gone to lie in Abraham's bosom," said the German under-steward. "He shomped overboard, and is det ash pork."

I was more disgusted and amazed by the men's indifference than their speech. They might have exprest themselves bluntly and even coarsely about their captain's disappearance, and yet have shown by something in their manner that they were impressed by it and puzzled, and in a measure troubled by what it might turn out to signify as regarded the safety of the ship, and so forth. But these fellows spoke as if they were talking of a hen or pig that was missing. I turned from them and walked aft to the Finn, but they all followed and stood near the wheel with me. There was not light enough to see the face by. All one saw was the pallid glimmer of it. The sheen off the binnacle-card came no higher than Grondhal's breast, and he looked down at us from the gloom above it with a gleam where his eyes were, and his countenance thickened up into shadow by his cap and straggling hair and the littleness of his lineaments in the dusky frame of flesh and bone around them.

"The steward has just called to me to say that the captain is missing," I exclaimed, addressing him. "What can you tell us about this extraordinary and dreadful thing?"

"Ashk me questions," said he not uncivilly and in a quiet voice ; "I am a bod hond at yarnin in English."

"What was the captain doing before you requested to be relieved at the wheel?"

"He vos shtanding dere," he answered, removing one hand from the wheel to point to a part of the rail abreast of where we were, "looking over inter der vater."

"What did you say to him?"

"I say, 'Shkipper, can I be relieved a minute ash I wants to go forward?' I say, und he come up at vonce und take hold of der wheel und shay, 'You can go forward.'"

"How long were you forward?"

"About five minutes."

"Did you go into the forcastle?"

"Yash ; I was dere two or dree minutes."

"And you heard nothing?"

"Notting."

"Who could hear in the fo'ksle?" here interrupted the cook. "If me and the steward sleeping on deck wasn't disturbed by the splash, what sort o' sound could it ha' been to reach the fo'ksle?"

"And when you came on deck?" said I, proceeding with my questions.

"Ven I comes on deck I valks aft und finds der vheel mit nobody at it. I says to myshelf, 'De shkipper hov gone below.' But I tinks it strange dot he leave der ship to shteer herself."

"Was she in the wind? had she rounded to? how was she going?"

"Der helm vos amidships und she vos heading straight, der vind blowing true over dere toffrail."

"What first gave you the idea," I asked, "that the captain had committed suicide?"

The steward broke in: "I can answer that, sir. It might have been five or six minutes after Grondhal here had returned to the wheel that I woke up, and feeling a bit peckish, I thought I'd go into the pantry for a biscuit. Well, seeing nobody but Grondhal aft, I steps up to him and he told me the yarn he's given you in his answers. Thinking it queer that the captain should let the ship drive along with no one to steer or look after her, I goes below, and noticing that his cabin door was open, I peeped in and saw he wasn't there. Then I looks into the other berths, and there being no signs of him below, I goes back to Grondhal, and after a few words I run forrards and calls the others, and we all turned to and sarched high and low; which being done and nothen resultin', I then thinks proper to wake you up and tell you what our notions is."

"It's no notions," said Eye; "it's the truth, mate. The cap'n's jumped overboard and drowned hisself. 'Splain the bloomin' job in any other way if you can."

I walked forward some distance to get clear of these men in order to think. Had there been foul play? The story told by the steward seemed straightforward enough; his assurance that he and the cook were asleep near the long-boat when Grondhal came forward, I believed; and it was impossible to doubt that the other three men who formed the watch below were turned in in the forecabin at the time. (I should here say that the German under-steward now slept forward.) If, then, Pipes had been made away with, the Finn was his murderer, that is to say, he had been alone in the crime. The man was villain enough to be capable of such a deed I was sure; but then, had he pluck enough for the job? He knew Pipes carried a pistol in his bosom, and judging from the manner in which he had staggered and cowered away before it, and from the ashen terror that had come into his face on that occasion, I gravely questioned whether he would have had spirit enough even to lift his hand before the old man whilst he went armed. Then there was another consideration: if the Finn had thrown the captain into the sea, it seemed certain that on so still a night as that was the splash of the body would have aroused the cook or the steward; besides that, the old man would have cried out as he was hurled over the rail, and when he came to the surface he might have cried out again, for the ship was moving

very slowly, and his cries from the water would have been very audible; whereas, if he had committed suicide, then, with the cunning of insanity, he would let himself down gently into the sea, guessing that the noise of a loud splash, such as his body must make, would arouse the sleepers on deck—if indeed he suspected that the men were sleeping—and bring them after him.

Maybe it was the recoil of every instinct in me from the notion that murder had been done that made me eager and willing to suppose that poor old Pipes had destroyed himself. I recalled his strange manners, his unbearable temper, and then his broken-down spirits, his vacant stare, his fits of doggedness followed by passages of irresolution, and how I had found him on that night in his cabin wide awake and brooding instead of being turned in and asleep. I say I recalled these and other points, and everything I remembered of his behaviour since that business of the wreck helped to persuade me that if the old seaman were really out of the ship, he had taken advantage of the Finn going forward and of his being alone on deck to slip overboard and drown himself.

But I confess that after the first shock of the news had passed from me, and I had spent some time in thinking how Pipes's disappearance was to be accounted for, the consideration that the ship was now without a captain, without anybody on board capable of navigating her, that here were Miss Agnes and I in the middle of a vast sea with no other associates than three seamen, two of whom were certainly ruffians—I mean Grondhal and Eye; Nipper had so far given me no occasion to think very ill of him—and three “idlers,” as they are called, all of them possessed of mean and untrustworthy characters: I say the consideration of these things, along with the fears that arose in me as to how now our voyage was to progress, and what was to be the issue of it, took such a hold that it seemed immaterial whether Pipes had been murdered or whether he had committed suicide: it was enough that he was out of the ship; and when I thought of it a bitter sense of helplessness fell upon me, such as you may understand if you will but put yourself in my place in imagination, and think of yourself as standing upon the quarter-deck of that ship with the reddish moon waning on the port beam, and making immeasurable the appearance of the ocean glooming out to the blood-like trickle under the orb that way, and the sails rising dim and faint to the stars, and the soft wind breathing low through the rigging as it blew warm as the breath over the taffrail—such as you may understand, I say, when to this picture you add the uncertainty and fear inspired by the spacious leagues of sea stretching out into the indigo of the sky, the helplessness of the girl dependent upon you, the characters of the men with whom you *are thrown*.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I SEARCH THE SHIP.

IT was the feeling of helplessness I have just written about that determined me to search the ship myself. It was all very well for men to say they had looked everywhere; but if their hunt had had no more spirit than their language had shown concern for the captain's disappearance, then, to be sure, another and a most careful exploration would be needful before I could satisfy myself that the worst had befallen the poor old man. The crew still hung about the wheel conversing. I was not well enough acquainted with the construction of the vessel's interior to be able to undertake a search over her so as to content me; I therefore walked up to the men and said, "My lads, I should like to have another look for the captain. I don't doubt you made a close inspection; but the loss of the master of this ship must prove a very serious thing to all on board by depriving us of a navigator; and before, therefore, we make up our minds that he is out of the vessel, we might as well turn to and have another good overhaul of her; for there's no telling what place you may have overlooked, nor in what strange hole or nook, supposing him to have been mad as you believe, he may have hidden himself."

"Mishter Aubyn's quite right," exclaimed the Finn. "Did you go into der hold? Did you look inter der shain-lockers? Huv you been inter der after-peak?"

"What's the good of looking into such places as *them*?" said the steward contemptuously, pulling out a pipe and striking a match, the flame of which from the hollow of his hand threw its light upon the face of the Finn, who instantly reared himself with a backward movement from the wheel to get away from it.

"De captain's det ash pork, dat's vat *I* shay," exclaimed the German under-steward.

"Any way," said I, "I mean to search the ship to make sure; and I should be glad if one of you would lend me a hand to do so."

"I'll go along with you," said Nipper, after a few moments' pause all round. "Steward, where's the lantern you used?"

"You'll find it in the pantry," answered the steward, who had seated himself on the grating, and was smoking complacently and swinging his legs. "You're bound on a useless errand, Mr. Aubyn. Ye'll find nothing living below unless it's rats." A low, hoarse laugh broke from the Finn at this. "Captain Moses Pipes has committed suicide by castin' his body overboard, as sartin as that there red hobject out yonder's the moon."

"Shtill dere's no harm lookin' for 'im," said Grondhal.

I walked to the companion, and Nipper followed me. *As we went down the steps I told him we had best begin with the cabin and examine all the berths there, as though in fact ours was the first*

search ; for the manner in which the steward had answered the Finn's question whether the hold, chain-lockers, and other places had been looked into satisfied me that the hunt the men had made must have been a very short and narrow one, maybe because they all believed the captain was overboard. Nipper fetched and lighted the lantern, and we went along the rows of berths, taking them one by one, and moving very quietly and speaking in whispers, as I did not want Miss Agnes to catch scent of what had happened until the night was gone and daylight was in the air to take courage from and hope. It made one mournful enough to see all the belongings of those friends and companions of ours who had rowed away to the wreck, scattered about the berths as though the owners were on deck and would come below shortly. In the Inglefields' cabin there were a hand-glass and a pair of ivory-backed brushes, looking as if they had been put down in a hurry—I can't tell you why ; but that was their suggestion to me, and in a flash up stood the stout figure of Mrs. Inglefield, and I saw her backing and filling before the glass as she figged herself out for the strange and miserable excursion to the hull. One found dresses, too, hanging up here, and the colonel's coats and trousers ; and under the bunks and in corners of the berth there were portmanteaus, bonnet-boxes, trunks, and so forth. It was the same with Edwards's and Hornby's berths, and the compartments in which the mates had slept ; they were all as they had been left, and there was something so natural and lifelike about these interiors, their aspect—with a coat thrown into a bunk, a pair of shoes on the deck, an open book, the unmade bed of one of the mates with the indent of his form fresh upon it—I say their aspect so persuaded one that their occupants had only just quitted them, that I positively found it harder to realize the loss of Mr. Edwards and the others, stale as that loss now was, than that Captain Pipes had disappeared.

He was assuredly in none of these berths, nor in his own ; yet the search here caused me to take notice of one fact : that there were very many valuable things amongst the luggage belonging to the missing party. As an instance, I saw in Edwards's berth, with its lid raised—whether so left, or whether since done, I could not say—a very costly and beautiful dressing-case, that literally shone in the lantern light with its gold mountings : all that he had for his toilet use was equally valuable in its way ; and when I observed that Hornby appeared to be pretty nearly as well off in such foppish elegancies ; and when I considered the jewellery the ladies had no doubt brought with them, and the value of the contents of the boxes and portmanteaus, taking them all round, including my own baggage, for I was not wholly destitute either—why, faith, the sense of the character of the fellows who formed the crew of the ship came upon me with a harder blow than the thought had yet administered, and a mighty misgiving seized me that Miss Agnes and I had only been reserved from going on to the wreck with our friends in order

that we might encounter experiences of another, and as it might turn out a worse, kind yet than that hull had been the theatre of.

However, I took care to preserve a composed face and to talk very quietly to Nipper, whom I was by no means unwilling to think well of, though one could never guess how the influence of the others might work in him.

"We may as well make an effectual search of the ship," said I. "I may take it that the men didn't hunt very far."

"Why, no," he replied; "the two stewards overhauled these here berths and the rest looked about the decks. Since he's not in the cabin, I don't think you'll find him anywhere else; but I'm quite willing to help you to search; for as you say, if the captain's gone, it'll be a bad job as we don't want no—" he checked himself with a hurried glance round, and holding up the lantern, said in a different voice, "Where shall we look next, sir?"

"We may as well try the lazarette," I answered.

The hatch leading into this part of the hold was under the after table. It was closed, and it was impossible to suppose that if Pipes had descended through it, he could have closed it after him. But then I was resolved to examine every part of the ship. I had made up my mind to consider the old fellow as mad and extremely cunning, and until I was certain he was not in the vessel, I determined to act upon this theory of him, and to omit no hole or corner. Nipper dropped below first, and I followed and found myself in a compartment well stocked with provisions for the ship's use, casks, coils of rope, and so forth. It was extremely hot down here, and after crawling and peering for a few minutes, my underclothes were soaked through with perspiration. The lantern-light flung many a fantastic shadow on the skin of the ship, and often I'd catch myself starting at what exactly resembled the outline of a human form skimming along the sides, or overhead, whilst I'd see Nipper's eyes gleaming like embers in the shine upon his face, as he'd come to a sudden stand with a fearful stare abreast of him, or into a dead black corner over my shoulder. The belief that the skipper was drowned caused the search for him in the ship's dark inside to put a fancy of ghosts into Nipper's head; I am pretty sure of that; his eye was bright with superstition; and he never shoved his nose round a coil of warp, or peered over between a couple of casks, without suggesting by his manner that if a phantom suddenly uprose, he was always standing by to sing out and run away, as though the apparition would be nothing more than he expected.

The skipper was not in the lazarette, and we were pleased enough to scramble out of the place, I to escape the intolerable heat, and Nipper because there remained so much less of the ship to explore. *There was a door in the cabin bulkhead that led to the half-deck and from this place the 'tween-decks lay right away open, a long clear sweep of empty space, to as far as the fore-castle bulkhead*

The light breeze held everything steady on deck : the ship floated without a creak or a strain upon the smooth water : and the silence along the cavernous interior, with the shadows drawing away from the pale glare of the lantern into an ebony darkness that prevented one from imagining to what distance this hollow space penetrated, could not have been profounder had the ship been resting, a green and glimmering phantom, upon her keel five thousand fathoms deep.

We walked along, nothing stirring but our shadows in the swing of the lantern-light and dusky flittings upon the skin or walls of the ship, past the mainmast, and chain-lockers and pump-casing, till we were stopped by the forecastle bulkhead ; then we returned and went down into the hold by a stanchion with bits of steps nailed to it, and here we found ourselves atop of the ballast that was piled up in a great mound, the summit of which came close to the deck. It consisted of river shingle and big lumps of stone, and looked by the light we bore a mountainous mass of stuff.

"There's no signs of him hereabouts," said Nipper, holding the lantern high and peering round.

"We'll go right aft first," I answered after a long survey of as much of the surface of the ballast as I could see ; and down we trudged, gritting and crunching to the after-hold that was full of old lumber, warps, dunnage, and the like. We were deep in the water here, with the kelson close under our feet and the sternpost, with the rudder hanging just beyond, against our ears, so to speak ; yet the stillness was unbroken ; it was wonderful ; it made me contrast it in fancy with the roaring, boiling, crashing sounds one would hear in this place in a gale of wind, the shock and wrench of the surge-beaten rudder, the creaking, grinding, and straining of massive timbers, above all the wildness and fierceness of the movements of this extreme end of the hull now flung up to the brow of a towering sea, and now let fall into a hollow that lifted the white water swelling to the mainbrace bumpkins.

"Hush !" cried Nipper, standing stock still, and squinting past the lantern with rounded eyes at a huge warp.

"What do you hear ?" I exclaimed, instantly excited.

"Hell alive ! what's a-coming !" he yelled, making a spring backwards that would have stretched him flat but for his plumping with his stern against the mizzen-mast.

As he shrieked, out jumped from I can't tell you where, five or six enormous rats ; they skurried past me, one slinging clean between my legs, bolted up the ballast, and in a breath were lost in the darkness. The light may have magnified them ; or maybe it was my own alarm ; but I protest as they fled by they looked more like young cats than rats. I have a greater horror of these animals than of anything else that moves on four feet ; and for fear that there might be more of them knocking about, I called to Nipper to *bear a hand* and bring the lantern along, and made all the haste I *could to overhaul* this after-hold for any signs of Captain Pipes.

"He's not in the ship, sir; you may be sure of that; he was made daft by the loss of his passengers and men, and has chucked himself overboard," exclaimed Nipper, whose nerves had received a shock, and who was anxious to cut this hunt short.

"I fear that it is as you say," I replied. "But since we're below we may as well look forward; it won't take us long to do so; and if he's not *there* then we can have no further doubt as to what's become of him."

Making no answer to this, he led the way forwards, and I went stumbling over the ballast close behind him so as to get all the benefit I could out of the lantern he held. We went down the pebbly and stony slope into the fore-peak, which we found half full of coal, along with a heap of odds and ends which there is no need to particularize. I stood looking and looking, but the place was as vacant of Captain Pipes as the other parts of the vessel were, and with a sudden sinking of the heart, accompanied by a feeling of consternation, I climbed the stanchion leading to the forehatch and gained the 'tween decks.

I cannot say that I had begun this search with the belief that Pipes had hidden himself; yet I had undertaken it not without a kind of hope; therefore I was sensible of great disappointment now that we had explored every part of the vessel, including the chain-lockers; for I should have said that we peeped into them before we went into the after-hold; and this emotion revived in me with threefold power that depressing feeling of helplessness which had seized me when I had moved away from the men and stood alone looking out upon the dark sea. We entered the cabin to get on deck, as all the hatches were covered, and Nipper extinguished the lantern and replaced it in the steward's pantry. When I reached the deck I found the men where I had left them, gathered about the wheel, that was still grasped by Grondhal; they looked as though they were waiting for me to arrive and tell them the result of my search.

The moon had vanished, but the dusk was finer and clearer than it had been when she was sinking; one could see outlines plainer; there was even a kind of sharpness in the edges of the sails spreading out square and dim into the darkness, and I could faintly make out the faces of the men. Many of the stars shone with the brilliance and ardency of fire, and the breeze still blew mild and steady, gushing softly out of the gloom astern into the canvas, and giving the ship way enough for her to thread the broken starlight in the water beyond her counter with a vein of green sparkles.

"Well, sir, no luck, I allow?" exclaimed the steward, rising as I approached from the grating and coming close to hear me.

"No," said I; "Captain Pipes is not in the ship."

The Finn gave a grunt that might have signified anything; and the under-steward cried, "Det ash pork; dat's vot I shay?"

"Where did you look, Charley?" inquired Eye, addressing Nipper.

"Look?" exclaimed Nipper; "why, wherever a chap could shove his nose."

"I suppose you're satisfied now, sir," said the cook to me in his usual sulky voice. "You're willing to believe your own eyes, anyhow."

I took no notice of this, and addressing them generally, said: "Well, the captain's gone; there's no doubt about *that*; and here we are 'without a head, without a navigator. Is there any man among you that can use a sextant?"

There was no reply, though I saw Nipper shake his head.

"I'm no sailor, as you know," I continued, "and have no knowledge of navigation. I understand dead reckoning, and might make shift to shove the ship along for a port by means of the log——"

"But what port are we a-goin' to be bound to?" interrupted the cook. "I've had enough of able seaman's work. I signed for the galley, and as this here ship's turned out the most sickening job as ever a man had anything to do with, I'm for cutting the bloomin' woyage short, leaving nowt but the tail and chuckin' the head and shoulders overboard."

"We couldn't do better," said I.

"It was me ash recommended der shkipper to shteer for Pernambuco—you remember, Mishter Aubyn?" exclaimed the Finn from the gloom into which he towered at the wheel. "Dat vos because ve vos very shorthonded. Vell, he tretten me vid his revolver," here he gave a grim, unpleasant chuckle, "und say he vould carry der ship to England. Dot vould not be treating us ash men, by Gott. But he has trowned himshelf und ve are our own mashters, und can stheer der ship to hell if so be ash dat course please us."

Eye and the under-steward and the cook laughed loudly. Well I remember that harsh mirth and the uncanny echo of it as it floated forward on the breeze and came down out of the hollowed sails.

"That port may suit you, Grondhal," said Nipper; "but I'm for steering for some place where life ain't all puspuration, and where, when you're tired of dancing, there's no pitchforks to compel ye to go on cuttin' capers."

"For God's sake, men, let's discuss this matter seriously," I exclaimed, afraid that if they got joking about it they would fall into a reckless and audacious vein, and settle upon some scheme of a desperate nature: for I well knew what sailors are, and how "chaff" amongst them will lead to horseplay, and horseplay to defiant resolutions which carry them Heaven knows where when *they are free*, as these fellows were, to follow their own inclinations.

"If you'll tell me to what port you're all agreed we ought to carry the vessel, I'll go below and consult the chart and see if I can make out a course to the place."

"What's the nearest port—that's the question?" grumbled the cook.

"Vy, Pernambuco. Sphlit my vind, Shoseph, you ought to know det, man," exclaimed Grondhal.

"Then let's steer for Pernambuco : that's what I say!" cried the cook. "I'm sick of the woyage. I'm sick of the ship. I'm sick of the sea ; and I'm for getting ashore as fast as hever we can get the wind to blow this cussed old hooker along."

"I'm for Pernambuco, too" said Nipper. "There's no call to go on mucking about strivin' to sail the ship to England, when we can make a quick and heasy job of it by headin' her to the westwards."

"What about the salvage?" exclaimed Eye.

"Salvage!" answered the steward : "there's no salvage here, mate. You'll only be a sailing of the ship you belong to, doin' of your duty by her : there'd be no saving of her. Think of Eye talkin' of salvage!" and he burst into a laugh.

"Den are ve all agreed to shail to Pernambuco?" demanded Grondhal.

There was a general affirmative murmur.

"Den praps Mishter Aubyn vill not mind going below," continued the Finn, speaking very civilly, "und look at der chart, und find out der course."

"I'll do the best I can in that way," I replied ; "and whilst I'm below will you settle among yourselves how the work of the ship is to be carried on? So far as I am concerned, I am completely at your service for any duties I am capable of performing. I will keep watch, pull and haul, go aloft, and do what I can."

"Yes, we'll talk that business over whilst you're below, sir," said Nipper.

I walked to the companion hatch. In the act of descending I heard Eye exclaim, "It's tiring work discussin politics in a man's watch below. I wonder what sort o' flavey the cabin brandy's got?" I paused to hear what followed. The cook said, "What d'ye need to *screech* out your notions for, you blazin' fool? d'ye want 'em to hear you in the City o' London? what's left of the cabin lush is to be quietly habstracted, I guess, and let them as is out of the ship get the benefit of having drunk it. Eh, steward?"

There was a short laugh, and then Grondhal said something about Pernambuco; on which I descended into the cabin.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WE CHANGE THE SHIP'S COURSE.

THE lamp that had been alight in the captain's cabin when I called the poor old fellow to come on deck was still burning, I entered

and stood for some minutes at the table at which I had found him seated, glancing round me and lost in deep and troubled thought. The ordinary seaman's remark about the flavour of the cabin brandy, and the cook's answer to the fellow, caused me great uneasiness. As yet the captain was only just missing ; the men had hardly had time to fully understand that there was no head to the ship, and that there was nobody to hinder them from doing what they pleased ; I was still a passenger, a friend of the owner of the vessel, who might assert a claim on behalf of his cabin-associates to all that was for the use of our part of the ship ; and so the drink was to be "abstracted" cautiously, unknown to me. But how long was this going to last ? How long would it be before the men lost all sense of my position and acted without the least regard to my presence and entreaties and threats ? I had noticed, whilst searching the ship for the captain, that there was enough wine and spirits in the lazarette to keep the crew continuously drunk for weeks : and I felt a chill penetrate to my very soul when I thought of the condition Miss Inglefield and I would be reduced to, should the fellows once break loose in that way, and make devils and filthy, sodden, breathing carcases of themselves with the contents of the casks and bottles under the cabin hatch.

But no good could come from letting my fancies run ahead in this fashion. The girl and I had certainly been plunged, with terrible abruptness too, into a most singular and serious plight ; but then at sea one never knows how soon an extraordinary thing may happen to procure one's deliverance from peril ; and it is because the sea is full of surprising chances in all forms that the sailor, even in the forlornest and most miserable state, finds the light of hope bright when to the landsmen, ignorant of the ocean, all would be cold, and lifeless darkness, and waters, measureless and without promise, rolling in gloom.

There was a shelf full of charts over the table and a canvas bag of them in a corner. Some were very old. I came across the chart of the North Atlantic that Pipes had used and marked with the prickings of his course ; but could not discover anything south of the line that had been under his hands. However, that may have been because I did not spend much time in looking ; since after pulling a few charts out of the bag, I came across one that gave me the Brazilian coast and as much of the Atlantic waters as I needed to enable me to project a course from where we were to Pernambuco. I laid this upon the table, and after a short hunt found the log-book that had been removed by Pipes, as I supposed, from the mate's cabin ; and there I read, under date of the preceding day, the latitude and longitude the ship was in at noon. The entry was in Pipes's hand, of course ; and the sight of his rough scrawl, together with his two or three mis-spelled words in the quaintly expressed *observations* touching the weather and the like, caused me to forget for some moments the business I was upon, and I sat with my

orehead leaning on my hand overhanging the chart, thinking and wondering about him.

There was enough to put him strong before my mind's eye. Against the bulkhead hung clothes familiar to me; the worn pilot-coat, the waterproofs and black sou'wester, the camlet jacket I had many a time seen on him since we had entered the hot climate; and small as these matters were, and his meerschaum pipe near a chronometer case, and his rather rusty chimney-pot hat, that he'd sometimes wear on Sundays in fine weather, they nevertheless gave a surprising edge to my thoughts about him, and in imagination I had the poor old seaman standing before me whilst I sat, with bitterness and worry at heart, conjecturing what could have been the manner of his end. I said to myself again, "Has he been murdered? and if so, was the Finn alone in the affair, or were the others concerned in it?" But I soon got to see that thinking of this kind was extremely rash; for if the men had thrown the captain overboard, they might watch me and talk with me critically to observe how much I suspected; and if they should come to suppose by my manner and speech (which it was impossible for me to say I could perfectly control, if I believed Grondhal or the others to be murderers), that I laid Pipes's death to their account, why, they might serve me as they had served their commander. Besides, let the truth be what it might, the knowledge of it could not profit me. It was enough that the captain had disappeared; that the ship was leagues and leagues away out in the Atlantic, without a soul who could navigate her on board; that a timid young girl and myself were associated with six men whose characters might not, indeed, be so bad as I feared, but of whom there were four certainly I heartily distrusted: this was enough, I say. My business was not to sit wondering and vapouring over the manner of the captain's loss, but to consider that he was gone, and to set to work, with the best heart I could summon up, to keep the men to their resolution to sail to Pernambuco, and help them to steer her to it, and so get ashore there with Miss Inglefield and end the discomforts and perils which had come upon us.

I therefore addressed myself in earnest to the chart, and marked with a pencil the exact spot the ship was in at noon on the previous day, according to Pipes's entry of the longitude and latitude; I then calculated that she had sailed so many miles to the northward since I had aroused the captain, and this small distance I likewise marked upon the chart; I then by means of a pair of parallel rulers ascertained that the course to Pernambuco from our present position would be west by south; and this being all I required to discover, I went on deck.

It was hard upon three o'clock. The dim, quick glimmer of phosphorus in the dark water denoted a little increase in the weight of wind, but the slipping of the swift ship before it, left it still to my fancy the same soft breathing it had been from the outset.

Occasionally there would break a faint violet glare of lightning over the south-east sky low down upon the horizon; yet the heavens were cloudless and the stars brilliant and beautiful. The temperature was made delicious by the dew that fell like rain and darkened the decks with its moisture.

I found Eye steering, and asked where the others were. "In the waist, if they're not below," he replied. I stepped forward and met the five of them pacing to and fro in procession in a walk that extended from the mainmast to the fore-rigging. They halted and drew around me, every man with a pipe in his mouth.

"I've found out our position," said I.

"What is it?" interrupted the cook. "Not furdur out at sea than we bargained for, I hope?"

I gave him the latitude and longitude, on which he exclaimed—"Oh, blow all larned terms. Can't ye tell us how fur we're off from the Brazil coast in miles?"

"Look here, Shosef," exclaimed Grondhal, "you pelay your jaw, mate. How der tevil ish Mishter Aubyn to tell us vot he has found out if you interfere vid his talk."

This was said with a note of authority that could not be mistaken, and the cook accentuated it by making no reply.

"From where we are," said I, "Pernambuco bears west by south, and the distance is about eight hundred miles; so that with anything approaching a decent favourable breeze the *Silver Sea* should be able to make that port in five or six days."

A short silence followed this, and then Nipper said, "Well, I'm of the cook's opinion. I've had enough of the *Silver Sea*. I'm for clearin' out of this bloomin' barkey, specially now there's no boss, for though I've been in a ship where the captain's died of fever, there was two mates left to look after her; but here"—he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, glanced aloft, and exclaimed, "I'm damned if it ain't pretty nigh as bad as being marooned."

"Only that there aren't no liquor knockin' about on wacant rocks, Charley," exclaimed the cook.

"Shut oop, Shosef," cried the Finn, capping his exclamation with a sound that might possibly have been a Finnish or Russian oath.

"What have you settled upon as regards the working of the ship?" I inquired.

"Vy," answered Grondhal, "dat it'll be all hands on deck in Lascar fashion. All der vay to Pernambuco ve shall keep der hot vedder, und ve can shleep on deck und get our meals as ve require, und der can always be von man on der look-out as vell as der man ot der vheel."

"That seems a good plan," said I, "for every man then will be at hand ready for a call."

"It's the best arrangement," exclaimed Nipper. "There's no *endurin'* the fore-castle in this weather; so sleepin' and living on

deck'll be no hardship even to this Dutch dish-clout," referring to the under-steward who, not catching the meaning of the sailor's expression, took no notice of it.

"Well, I'm not fond of doo myself," said the steward, giving the word "dew" a pronunciation of his own; "and after what I saw of Mr. Edwards, not to mention my grandmother, whose right foot was twisted clean round and the corner of her mouth drew up into her ear, so that when she spoke the words seem to come as it might be out of her back hair, why I don't want the roomatics for one. But since all hands is to keep on deck, then nat'rally I'm agreeable, only stipulating that I may wrop myself up when I lay down and put my head under shelter whenever I can find some. For only feel the doo a fallin' now!" he exclaimed, extending his hands; "it's as soakin' as rain."

"Now that you're all agreed in this matter, hadn't we better head the ship along the course we want her to go?" said I. "Every mile of nothing we make carries the vessel nearer to those abominable doldrums where we may be becalmed for weeks."

"Right!" cried Grondhal; "let's get de yards roun', boys."

I ran aft and gave Eye the course to which to bring the ship, and then joined the others at the braces. I was in good spirits and no longer uneasy, for there seemed to me all the honesty I could need to see in the resolution the men had formed to turn the ship's head towards Pernambuco, and in the arrangement they had made among themselves to keep the deck day and night. In a few minutes the yards were trimmed, and the *Silver Sea* with a slight list was pushing through the water with her head at west by south, the liquid wrinkles under her bows streaming aft in lines of gold, and the cool south wind gushing over her port rail with weight enough to keep even the heavy cloths of the foresail stirless.

Suddenly Nipper, who was coiling a rope up over a pin somewhere abreast of the mainmast, sung out, "Boys, d'ye see that there lightning out yonder?"

The Finn crossed over to him and said, "Vot orf it?"

"Why, nothen," responded Nipper, "except that it gives me an idea, and it's this: we ought to keep the ship under very easy sail. Never mind bein' in fine-weather latitudes, says I: wherever the ocean rolls there's a chance of tempests; and considering that they're but three men aboard this seven-hundred ton hooker capable of rolling up a sail or knowing what to do with a reef earring, my opinion is that we ought to keep the vessel snug day an' night."

I overheard this, and, approaching the two fellows, said, "I agree with you, Nipper. But what canvas would you keep her under?"

"Why, under topgallant sails," he answered. "I'd keep all three royals stowed—ay, and send the yards down for the matter o' that; an' I'd furl the mainsail an' outer and flying jibs, and

that being done and a bright look-out kept, I don't see what's to hurt us."

"Nothing like cashy shail, shay I," exclaimed the Finn, "und I agrees vid Nipper. Boot der'll be no shtorm to-night, Mishter Aubyn, und if ve vait to furl de shail in ter morning, der idlers vill be able to shcee, und to verk better."

"All right," said I.

"Beg your pardon," said Nipper, addressing me very civilly, "but I hope you won't think there's any need for you to keep on deck because we men, who are used to a seafaring life, agree that under the circumstances it's the best thing to do. You can take your turn at the wheel and at keeping a look-out and welcome; but you're a gent and not used to roughin' it, and when you want to lay down the cabin's the proper place for you to do it in."

"Beshides," said Grondhal, "Mishter Aubyn hos ter novigate der ship, und derfore he hos a right to ter cabin."

This sounded odd: as if nothing but my having to navigate the vessel entitled me to the use of my own berth! However I simply said, "Well, as you say, Nipper, I am not used to the seafarer's rough life, and should certainly prefer my bunk below to a plank on deck. But of course it's understood that I share in all your labours and make myself useful wherever I can. I shall want the log kept going every two hours, and the figures must be written down plainly on the slate."

They both answered that that would be all right.

I was extremely tired—fatigued rather than sleepy; the search through the hold had greatly wearied me, and to that must be added the excitement I had felt on learning that the captain was missing, and the misgivings and alarm raised in me by wondering whether Pipes had drowned himself or been thrown overboard, and by thoughts of the men whom Miss Inglefield and I had in the strangest, abruptest, most tragical manner become the associates of. Nipper and Grondhal quitted the vessel's side; the former went forward, the latter walked aft, and I saw his huge form moving through the gloom till he came to the after skylight, which he closed and then lay upon. The others had coiled themselves near the galley, and I supposed that everybody was down but the man at the wheel, until I presently noticed some one walking in the waist, who, on hailing him, I found was Nipper keeping the first look-out, as had been agreed upon amongst the men. There was a light swell running now—the first movement perceptible in the water that day. The pulsation swung the folds of the mainsail that was hauled up to the yard, and it put a pale gleam into the swell of the other sails when every gentle curtsey increased the tautness of the curved canvas for the starlight to glisten on. It was still a gloriously fine night. I could not see a speck of cloud to blot out the smallest of the stars, which were making the sky resemble a

sheet of white fire. Down in the quarter whence the swell was coming there would be at intervals a dim, delicate opening and shutting, so to speak, of lightning like the falling of the sheen among the stars there of some vast revolving lantern with differently coloured glasses, for sometimes it would be violent and then green like phosphorus, and then yellow as though it was the reflection of the flash of a gun.

These things did not occupy me many moments in observing. I walked aft to look at the compass, and found the ordinary seaman holding the ship true to the course I had given. It was like feeling that this unhappy voyage was almost over to mark how the vessel's head lay, and then to look over the taffrail and see the phosphorus winking and sparkling out in a wake of which every fathom's length indicated that we were by so much nearer to the Brazilian coast. I dare say it was the cheerfulness put into me by this that caused me as I went below to consider that, after all, I may have shown a rather poor-spirited haste in concluding that, because the men had given Pipes trouble when he was in search of the wreck, they were a pack of dangerous ruffians equal to any kind of wrongdoing. Certainly I distrusted the Finn from the bottom of my heart; but then he had shown himself very civil that night, and the willingness with which he had come into my wish to steer the ship to Pernambuco did not, certainly, look as if he was capable of any of those dark and malignant designs upon the property of the vessel, and perhaps upon my life and Miss Inglefield's, which I should instantly have attributed to him had he opposed our heading for the near Brazilian port.

The truth was, I was in an easy temper of mind, and I was hopeful, and consequently much of my former distrust of the men ebbed out of my thoughts. I remembered thinking, as I entered my berth, that not only was this the nineteenth century, but that I was actually at sea, in a real sailing ship, and associated with men who knew where Tower Hill was, and not on board some visionary fabric constructed by the romancist, and manned by creatures of his imagination, who performed his bidding, sanguinary or otherwise, without the least regard to probability or to the character of sailors; and that therefore I should prove myself but a very weak-hearted individual if I allowed myself to be scared by dreams of rascality such as one reads of among pirates and slavers, and of mutinies and bloodshed such as one shudders over in the pages of the nautical novelist. And yet, for all that, more than one cold shiver passed through me when, as I lay awhile thinking of Pipes, I'd hear the wash of the passing water come sobbing up through the open scuttle, like the bubbling moan of a drowning man.

I slept till seven, and on observing the hour instantly sprang out of my bunk, wondering that the men should have let me lie till that time, though I reflected that it was nearly four o'clock

before I had come below, so that I had not been so very long turned in, after all. The ship was rolling apparently upon a strong swell, and there was evidently not wind enough to steady her. Though I had lain with my scuttle open for some time, I had fortunately had the sense to screw it up before falling asleep, otherwise my berth would have been flooded; for every dip of the ship brought the bright green sea in a swelling, thunderous volume, right over the thick glass of the circular window whence, as the vessel lifted away, the huge liquid folds washed off with a strangely heavy roaring sound. My sleep had refreshed me, and as I had merely pulled off my coat and shoes when I lay down, I was soon dressed and out of my berth.

As I approached the companion steps I saw Miss Inglefield sitting past it close up against the rudder-case. I pressed her hand cordially, and led her to the foremost table away from the heaving and creaking extremity of the ship, where at times it would have been difficult to hear each other's voice. She was pale, and there was a frightened look in her face, so that I wondered whether she had got to hear of Pipes's disappearance. I expressed the hope that she had passed a good night.

"No," she answered, "I have scarcely closed my eyes. My mind is full of my poor father and mother—and indeed of the others, but naturally of my parents first, Mr. Aubyn."

"I wish you would try to hope for the best," said I. "In spite of the deserted wreck, in spite of the capsized boat, your father and mother may be safe. Struggle to believe this till you reach home and learn the truth, however it may run. The hope will support you during the few remaining days of this voyage."

"The few remaining days!" she exclaimed, turning her saddened blue eyes upon me with surprise; "we are some weeks' sail from England, surely?"

"Yes, but we are now bound to Pernambuco—you may guess that by the course yonder tell-tale shows," I said, pointing to an inverted compass screwed to a beam.

This gladdened her, and she exclaimed, with a note of pleasure in her voice, "Then we shall soon be out of this ship, and there will be nothing to dread from her crew—I mean from the men who have been left with us. But what has caused Captain Pipes to change his mind? he seemed determined, even angrily determined to sail the ship home."

I looked into her pretty face very gravely, whilst I deliberated whether to tell her about Pipes now, or defer the news until she should seem a bit fitter to hear it; but on reflecting that she was bound very soon to ask me where he was, and that prevarication could serve no earthly purpose, I said, "During the night a very dreadful, mysterious thing happened. I was aroused by the *steward*, who told me that the captain was missing. I hurried on *deck*, and learned from the men that he had committed suicide!"

And here I repeated Grondhal's story of leaving Pipes at the wheel and coming aft and finding him gone! "I then," I continued, "with another man, searched every part of the ship's hold, without finding any traces of the poor old fellow; and there cannot be a doubt that he is drowned."

She kept her eyes fixed upon me until I had ceased, and then, tossing both her hands upon my arm, she cried breathlessly, "Oh, Mr. Aubyn, did not the Finn murder him?"

"Hush!" I exclaimed, with a swift glance round and up at the skylights; "we must not even dream of such a thing, lest our behaviour should express it, so dangerous would our suspicion make the man if he be guilty. I have sometimes thought that Pipes has been murdered," I went on, speaking in a whisper, "and I have sometimes believed he has committed suicide. I don't know which is the more likely of the two. I have thought the Finn capable of any crime; then we were witnesses of the captain threatening his life; and God knows what may have passed between them last night, though who can say that others of the crew were not concerned in his murder, if indeed he *was* thrown overboard? But on the other hand, remember the old man's moodiness and depression and fierce, lunatic fits of temper I have endeavoured to persuade myself that he has died by his own act. He seemed half-crazed, you know, by the loss of our party and his men."

"At what hour was he alone with the Finn?" she asked. I told her. "Then," she exclaimed, drawing a deep breath, "the splash I heard must have been caused by his body. It was very hot, and I unscrewed my window to cool the berth. About ten minutes after I had done this I heard a loud splash a little past my berth towards the stern. I believed it was a man, and lay with my heart beating wildly, making sure that if it was one of the crew who had fallen overboard, the man at the wheel, if there was nobody else on deck, would cry out, and that I should hear the noise of a rescue being attempted. But all remained perfectly still. I heard no sound either from the water or on deck. So I supposed the splash had been made by some useless heavy thing like a cask or an old bucket, having been tossed over the bulwarks."

"It was assuredly the captain's body," said I, shocked by her story; for though I *knew* he must be overboard, yet I had found it extremely difficult to persuade myself that he had perished, and this confirmation of my fears brought to me by Miss Agnes's plain statement startled me almost as much as if I had only just heard that he was drowned. "Was there no sound of scuffling before you heard the splash?"

"Nothing but a footstep."

"Did no cry follow the fall into the water?"

"No. I should have heard it, for the splash startled me terribly, and it made me strain my ears as one does in a fright."

"It's enough to induce one to think that the captain was dozing on the rail, and fell overboard asleep," said I; "only that would not tally with Grondhal's story, who declares he left him at the wheel and therefore, of course, wide awake. He *must* have committed suicide, Miss Inglefield. Your story as good as proves it. Had there been a struggle you would have heard it over your head, and Pipes would certainly have cried out when he was thrown overboard."

"He might have been first stunned," she exclaimed, "or perhaps seized unawares and hurled over the side. The Finn is almost a giant, Mr. Aubyn, and must be very, very strong."

I could not help smiling at the simplicity of her "very, very," though I had had enough of the subject, being indeed honestly afraid of it; for, as I have said, if the captain *had* been murdered, and it was felt we suspected as much, then God knows what might happen to us. So having fully explained my fears to the girl, and begged her not to breathe a word about having heard that splash alongside which she had told me about—that is to say to either of the stewards, for she was not likely to talk to any of the others—I changed the subject by speaking of the arrangements the men had made to work the ship, and how I had undertaken to navigate her to Pernambuco by dead-reckoning, a process I explained to her in a few sentences. I was then about to ask her to accompany me on deck when an idea occurred to me.

"Do you know," said I, "if your mother brought any jewellery with her on board—any 'valuables,' as they are called?"

"She brought her jewel-case, I know," she answered.

"Then," said I, "I wish you would kill the next half-hour by collecting whatever you can find in that way in your parent's cabin—any small, valuable things, I mean, which a thief could hide in his pocket or stow in the bosom of his shirt—and putting them into one of your own trunks. Dresses and coats and toilet things you can leave; they are not likely to be touched; though I should be glad to hide Edward's dressing-case, as it offers a great temptation. But his and Hornby's property must take its chance. It is possible that their cabins have been peeped into already, and their visible contents, such as the dressing-cases, noted. Hence it would not do to secrete anything from there, or it would be known we had done it, and the suspicion of the crew that our act implied might make them turn upon us."

"Do you think them capable of plundering the cabins?" she asked, looking frightened.

"I'd rather not give them the benefit of the doubt," I answered. "I have no high opinion of either of the stewards. They might consider what they found in the unoccupied cabins as their perquisites, and take whatever they could convey on shore with them *without risk of detection*. But there is no probability of your berth *being entered or overhauled*, and that is why I ask you to take

charge of all valuable small things belonging to your parents Miss Edwards's property will be safe by being in your cabin."

She at once entered her parents' berth, and I went on deck.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MEN ENJOY THEIR BREAKFAST.

WHEN I got on deck the cloudy and troubled appearance of the weather made me wonder what was the forecast of the aneroid in the captain's cabin. The sight of Miss Inglefield and my talk with her had driven all thought of it out of my head. I hurried below again to have a look, and found, as I might have anticipated, a fall heavy enough to make me suspect that there must be half a gale of wind somewhere back of the muddy appearance all round. The sea was a greasy blue colour, and the heads of the swells, taking the dim brownish light as they rolled, came along with a kind of blind stare at the sky, and then a slow settling down into their dim hollows as though they had seen enough. How to describe the heavens I am sure I don't know; the clouds had such a jangled, confused look, that the appearance is only to be figured by imagining some vast besom having swept them pell mell and from all parts into the circumference in which they lay. Streaks of dusky blue hung among them, and down over the sea-line they made a ring of pale-slate, against which you could see the swells rising and falling, just as the horizon shows when you look at it through a window-pane of cheap, bad glass.

It was strange to go below at four o'clock from under a dome of cloudless indigo that stretched an unbroken, untarnished veil of stars right over the deep, and come up at seven and find the ocean gloomy under masses of confused vaporous bodies and a swell, not heavy as yet, but full of volume and strength, swinging along over a surface that had been like ice for its evenness and placidity for hours and hours. The wind was north-east. It wrinkled the swells with languid furrows, and went with a sort of dull sound past the ear. It hadn't the power to keep the heavier sails full, and one hardly needed much weather experience to feel that it was a dying breeze, and would leave the playground of the deep vacant for the sporting of another and a livelier wind presently. The men had furled the mainsail, royals, and flying and inner jibs. They had also stowed the spanker, and the main royal and mizzen-top gallant staysails. I saw no one on deck except Nipper, who stood at the wheel.

This man, as I have before said, was the only one among the hands at this time on board in whom I felt disposed to feel some little confidence. He was cool and easy in his way of speakin

but such as his manner was, it was uniform; he had not, for instance, the Finn's capacity of being at one time exasperatingly insolent, and at another (for some reason or other) very humbly civil. He was about thirty years old, with a short black beard, sharp, small grey eyes, and the skin of his face was roughened by the traces of small-pox. He stood steering the ship with evident attention to his work, and he took no notice of me whatever until I went up to him.

"Where are the men?" I asked.

"Some in the galley, I dessay, and some below," he answered. "They've been up aloft, heating themselves—for climbin' does onmistakably bring the puspuration out of cooks and stewards—and they've gone to shift their shirts and cool themselves and see arter their breakfast."

As he spoke, I saw the Finn's singular head fork out of the galley. Observing me he stepped out, took a leisurely stare round, as if he would have me know that it was his look-out, and that he was keeping as bright a one as was necessary under the circumstances, and then stepped into the galley again.

"Do you know if the log has been kept hove?" I asked.

"It has. You'll find the speed wrote down on the slate," nodding towards the companion, under which the slate was kept on a bit of a shelf, with a little bull's-eye lamp slung over it.

"I notice a fall in the glass in the captain's cabin," said I. "We're in for a change of weather, and a nasty change too, I'm afraid."

He turned a sailory glance to right and left, and answered, "My notion is we can't begin to snug down too soon. The look of mud in this here swell's enough to make one fancy that the storm that's heaving of it ahead has strength enough to get to the very bottom of the hocean and disturb the muck a-lying there."

"Yes," I answered, with an uneasy peep at the sky, in one quarter of which I fancied the slately shadow had a slightly browner tinge than elsewhere—though to be sure this might be imagination worked upon by memory of the lightning that had faintly played down there during the darkness; "if we are going to have foul weather we ought to prepare for it whilst the wind's light enough to enable our few hands to be of use. The Finn's in the galley. I'll go forward and tell him what I think. If the men are willing to work—"

"Oh, *they'll* be in no hurry to get themselves drowned, I dessay," said Nipper, laughing. "Tell 'em of the fall in the glass—though I reckon they'll want to go to breakfast first," he added in a peculiar voice, and a half-grinning, half-embarrassed squint into the binnacle.

"If they'll go to work," I went on, "the best thing I can do is to *come and relieve you* that you may help them aloft. You'll be *worth half a dozen* of such as I am up there."

"All right, sir," said he.

I went forward and looked in at the door of the galley, which, I presume, it may be needless to say is the ship's kitchen, where all the cooking is done. The *Silver Sea* had been used as a passenger vessel, and her galley was therefore large for a ship of her dimensions. In it I found the stewards, the cook, and Grondhal, whilst I had noticed Eye drying himself in the head after a wash down. There were plates, knives and forks, cups and saucers and so forth laid out upon the dresser, and in addition to biscuit, jam, and a variety of other things of that kind, which of course I very well knew must belong to the cabin, there were three roast fowls on a dish in front of the fire, whilst the cook was busy in frying a number of rashers of bacon. The men did not appear in the least degree disconcerted by my putting my head in and observing all this, though I could now account for Nipper's sheepish look when he told me he dared say the crew would want to go to breakfast before they fell to work.

The Finn grinned at me and said, "No goot carryin' der live stock to Pernambuco. 'Tish better in our shtomacs nor in der pellites orf dem as vill hov der holdin' of dis hooker. Eh, sir?"

"Certainly," I replied, reflecting with the rapidity of thought that after all, though this killing of the poultry and helping themselves to the cabin stores should seem to many a downright piece of impudent robbery, it might be proved that under the peculiar circumstances of our case the men had a right to eat whatever there was on board. "Besides, Grondhal," said I, laughing and talking with the utmost pleasantness that I could infuse into my voice, "it would not be my business, even were it my wish, to prevent you from having as many good meals as you could manufacture out of what's eatable in the *Silver Sea*. I only ask you to leave enough for the young lady and me, and to help me to find our way to Pernambuco."

"Oh, ve knows you're on boardt," said the Finn. "Vot hov you gott for der laty's and shentleman's brokfost, Shosef?"

"Why," answered the cook, wiping the sweat off his pale forehead with his bare arm; "you can have a fowl, or there's 'am, or there's——"

"A little ham will do for us," said I. "But I am not here to talk about that, though I dare say the lady will be wanting her breakfast by eight, if you're not otherwise employed, steward."

"I thought we was all to help ourselves," exclaimed the cook, forking the hissing rashers on to a dish.

"It'll be time enough for me to carry my breakfast aft when the stewards refuse to do it for me," I said, eyeing him sternly. "I'm not your master, it's true; but I'm damned if you're mine; so the sooner we agree to let each other alone, the better. Make up your mind to that, will you? and you'll then find the ship big enough for us both."

He tried to stare me out, but he dropped his eyes after a bit, and I then said, "Now look here, men. You can see the appearance of the weather with your own eyes. I've been into the captain's cabin, and find a fall in the glass that betokens, as I take it, a storm of wind. I just looked in here to ask you to get the ship snugged down before it's upon us."

"We're bound to eat them first," said Eye, who entered the galley at that moment, and who spoke pointing to the fowls.

"Grondhal," said I, "you're an old sailor, and know what's right in scafaring. If you think there's time—"

"Shtop a minute," he interrupted, and stepped on deck. He cast a penetrating look around the horizon; then returned and said, "Der will be notting ter harm ontill long after breakfast. Den it will be a case of shtand by."

"Very well," said I; and without further words I walked away aft to the wheel.

"The men mean to get their breakfast before shortening sail, Nipper," said I; "and the best thing you can do is to join them. I'll steer the ship."

He made way for me to take the spokes, and said with a grin, "I allow they're cooking a pretty tidy blow-out in the galley, ain't they, sir? I don't fancy they intend to spare this here vessel's live stock and heatable stores; and after all," he exclaimed in an argumentative manner, whilst he gazed aloft and around as though his instincts were bound to keep him professional, even when his thoughts were far from his calling, "who's agoin' to blame 'em? Sailors are the worst fed men in the world; and if it wasn't for the fresh air they breathe, and the hexercise they take, they'd rot clean away out on the creepin' bread and diseased meat that's put aboard for their use. They'd be violating their natures as human beings if they didn't tuck in to whatever they come across as was good whenever the chance happened."

I agreed with him heartily in all this, but would not say so, lest it should lead him to deliver more opinions. The truth is, I was anxious for the men to end their breakfast that they might start upon snugging the ship, as the weather, to my apprehension, seemed to be growing momentarily more threatening in appearance. Nipper went forward, and I remained alone gripping the spokes, which the swell from time to time would twitch viciously enough to stretch my sinews pretty smartly. The decks were bare of men right throughout their length; and though I knew that the first shout I raised would bring the slender crew out of the galley, yet for all that, I can tell you it was with no agreeable feelings that I stood at that ship's helm and glanced at the darkness gathering all round the sea, and then looked up at the great stretches of canvas *upon the yards*; for the loneliness one felt through the men being *out of sight* bred a peculiar feeling of helplessness, and I'd catch *myself starting* even when a plunge down of the stern made the

wheel-chains rattle harshly in their leading blocks. The swell rolled steadily along in a sort of pouring volume of sluggish water that might have passed for melted lead for its curious thickness and heaviness ; yet spite of this regularity of heaving, the motion of the ship was more of a kind of wallowing than a fair, deep-sea heaving and plunging. Indeed, her troubled and bothered movements corresponded, with a strange niceness, with the appearance of the huddle of clouds over the mastheads and the look of the dingy mass of vapour round the sea. One seemed to feel, somehow, that the vessel knew foul weather was at hand, and that her awkward tumbling was caused by the restlessness in her, just as you may see a human being, expecting something bad to happen to him, twiddle and twirl himself about into postures so ungainly that he wouldn't know them for his own in a time of ease.

The breeze when I came on deck had been driving us along at about four knots ; but by the time I had taken the wheel the weight of it had sensibly diminished, and its power hardly went as far as the lightest lifting of the fore-course. Presently Miss Inglefield came on deck. She saw me, of course, at the wheel as she mounted the companion steps, but I noticed that she threw a glance around as she approached, most likely to see if the Finn was about, for I knew that she would have a dread and horror of that man now that she had got it into her head that he had thrown the captain overboard.

"Have you collected all the things your father and mother would most prize ?" I asked.

She replied "Yes." She had locked away her mother's jewel case and several articles of value. There might be more things in the boxes in the hold. She did not know. She was, at all events, sure that she had left in the cabin nothing likely to be coveted by the men and easily hidden.

"That is all we need concern ourselves about," said I. "What is in the hold will be safe enough, I have no doubt."

"Where are the men, Mr. Aubyn ?"

"In that house yonder, with the chimney on top of it, getting breakfast."

"Do they seem well disposed ?"

"I think so."

"Have they not spoken about the disappearance of Captain Pipes to you ? Have they not expressed any sort of sorrow or regret at his strange loss and no doubt cruel death ?"

"Why, no," said I, "not this morning ; all they had to say was said last night. Sailors are not sentimental people. When a thing has happened they make haste to dismiss it from their minds. The custom on the whole is a wise one, and in the case of Pipes, I don't think we can do better than imitate the example of the men ; for though I know *now* that all the crew are in that galley there, yet there might come a moment when we should find ourselves

talking without reckoning that at God knows what aperture there is a wide-open ear drinking in every syllable of our speech."

She inclined her head with a pretty gesture as much as to signify that I was quite right in what I said. She then questioned me about the weather, and looked with curiosity up at the sails, and then round the sea at the darkness there when I told her that I believed we should shortly have a gale of wind upon us; she also talked about the men and Pernambuco, and the distance to it and so forth. She made no further reference to the wreck, nor her parents, nor the others, for which I was really thankful, as I had completely exhausted my invention in trying to furnish her with hope and cheerfulness; and, besides, I considered our own position quite grave enough to justify us in forgetting all about our friends whilst we addressed ourselves to the job of our own deliverance. I do not know that I had ever thought her prettier or more gentle-looking than on that morning. It was a strange time to admire a girl in, I dare say, when one thinks of the galley being full of men I distrusted, and one of whom I thought a murderer, and of our captain being missing and perhaps desperately and bloodily missing, of our ship with scarcely hands enough in her to pick up a single sail, and of the sky gloomy with the shadow of an approaching tempest, and of the ship's safety, so far as the navigating of her went, being dependent on me, who could only steer her by the misleading art of dead-reckoning! I say it was a strange time; but, then, one is constantly meeting parentheses in the process of events holding meanings as irrelevant to what is going on as the blooming of a rose would be in a month of snow and ice. Miss Agnes stood on one side of the wheel and I on the other; the flaring smokiness of the sky just over the rail made a background upon which her hair under her hat gleamed out like a kind of faint sunshine; the pensiveness that the sorrow she felt put into her face sweetened it; and every peep I took at her caused me to find some fresh bit of prettiness in her, whether it was the maidenly diffidence expressed in the set of her lips, or the mild light that stole out of her blue eyes, or the different moods she'd convey by the slight movement of her eyebrows, or the dimpling of the fair flesh under her little chin when she'd drop her glance from the sails to look down into the compass or upon the white planks she stood on. I thought if it was only for her sake the ship must be carried safely to Pernambuco any way; and the swell giving the vessel a swing to port at that moment, I remember that into the grind-over I gave the spokes, I put three times as much muscle as was needed out of the sheer feeling of determination that seized me to bring this girl securely through our plight, let it assume what shape it would; whence you will perceive her prettiness—and not that only, *perhaps, for more goes to the making of a woman than a face—was beginning to exercise a distinct and referable influence upon me.*

After awhile the Finn came out of the galley, wiping his mouth on his hand, and feeling in his breeches' pockets for his pipe. He took a good look round, and then shook his head at me as much as to say that there was no hurry—no appearance of wind yet. He filled his pipe and re-entered the galley to light it, whilst Eye came out, holding the leg of a fowl in his hand, followed by the steward and the cook, the latter smoking. They all three stared up at the sky and were about to withdraw, when I sang out to the steward to remember that the lady and I hadn't breakfasted yet, and to tell Nipper to lay aft and relieve me as soon as he had eaten his breakfast. The fellow raised his hand in token of assent, but I knew the men would have a good long smoke, after such a sumptuous, unusual meal as they had swallowed, before they condescended to think of the ship's safety or of me and Miss Inglefield, and that there was nothing therefore to do but await their pleasure.

"What a pity we ever found that dreadful Finn in the water!" exclaimed Miss Inglefield. "I am sure he is the cause of all our misfortunes."

"Yes," said I. "Do you remember poor old Pipes laughing at me for repeating the superstitions sailors have about Finns? Were he alive I do not think he would ridicule those notions now. Ever since that fellow Grondhal has been aboard there has been nothing but ill-luck."

"I almost wish he would fall into the sea again, Mr. Aubyn; I am sure I should not think such an accident dreadful," said she with a sparkle in her eyes as she shot a glance at the galley. "How do you account for the steward casting in his lot with the others—breakfasting in that box there, for instance? He used to be civil enough when we were all together—a regular part of the cabin. I never cared for the German; but I always thought the steward a civil, respectable person."

"Why," said I, "first of all, the Finn seems to me to have obtained a sort of influence over the others, and the steward may be afraid of him. Then, he eats and drinks with the rest because the arrangement is that they are all to keep on deck and make one watch, as the term goes, and he must therefore do as the others do. Thirdly, the fellow would only recognize two people as having authority—I mean Hornby and the captain—and I don't doubt he considers that he is under no obligation to wait upon us now that his legitimate masters are gone. But all this needn't signify to us," said I, checking myself lest I should say too much, and noticing the gradual alarm widening in her eyes as she watched me intently. "We shall be ashore and out of this agreeable voyage in search of health, strength and pleasure in a few days, and we must think of that and nothing else," said I with an impatient glance round; for our yards, chock-ablock with every masthead, and the great squares of cloths from the big fore-course to the large main-topgallant sail spreading out with a sort of chalky whiteness against the confused

and crowded leaden-coloured stuff overhead, made the darkness of the sea mightily portentous.

We had not been talking many minutes before Nipper arrived to take the wheel. He touched his hat to Miss Agnes—an act that would not have been very noticeable under ordinary circumstances, though I relished it now as a bit of reassuring behaviour, and because it would give the girl a sense of the men's civility, though it was but one man's conduct, and that man the only respectable fellow of the lot as I would think. Shortly after the steward came along, followed by his German assistant, both of them bearing the materials for a breakfast for us. I said to Nipper, "Do you know if the men mean to turn to at once?"

"They'll wait for the stewards, sartinly," he replied, "and for you to finish breakfast, as they expect you to relieve me that I may lend a hand. Grondhal said he don't mean to do a stroke more of work than's necessary, and any one being otherwise engaged, must be waited for, otherwise *his* share of haulin' and stowing'll come upon the others."

"Well, he shan't be kept waiting for me," said I.

"It may be useful for you to know," said he, slightly sinking his voice, "that the feelin' among the men's this: there's very few of them, and the cook and the two chaps down there," pointing to the skylight, "are no good aloft; consequently all the ease that can be got is meant to be took; an' sooner than chivey about an' skin their bones in an emergency, they'd rather see every sail in the ship blow away fust."

"Though their conduct imperilled their own lives?"

"Oh, whilst they're happy they won't think nothen about that."

"But they mean to shorten sail in the face of yonder stuff?" said I, pointing.

"Yes, they'll shorten sail; but not afore it suits them," he answered, pulling a plug of tobacco from his pocket and thoughtfully examining the black square ere taking a bite.

I was resolved that the men should find no excuse for loitering in me; so Miss Agnes and I went below, where we found the stewards slapping the things they had brought aft with them, along with knives and forks and cups and so forth, down upon the table, as if they wanted us to understand that though they were not *yet* unwilling to wait upon us, we must be content with such waiting as they chose to give. I entered the captain's cabin to have another look at the aneroid; the hand had not stirred since I last inspected it, but on touching the instrument the index fell afresh. When I returned to the cabin the stewards had gone on deck. I noticed a smell of cavendish tobacco, the cause of which Miss Agnes explained by telling me that the German had stopped, when half way up the companion steps, to light his pipe, a piece of impertinence that so enraged me, I would have given twenty pounds at *that* moment for the privilege of breaking his head. Between them

the two fellows had left us plenty to eat ; several rashers of ham, coffee, biscuits, cold meat, &c. ; but the cook had taken care not to trouble himself to the extent of making us any rolls, though we never missed these little loaves when Hornby and Edwards were on board.

I hurried through the meal, and within ten minutes was on deck again, leaving Miss Agnes at the table. The wind was very faint now, but not yet gone, and the ship was still under command of the helm, as she lifted and rolled in her strange and bothered manner upon the sunless slopes of the sluggish swell. The clouds on high had crowded in till there was no more blue to be seen, and one witnessed a sort of lowering in the central mass of them as though the vapourish smother above was bearing down with its weight what it rested upon, as an awning bellies inwards when it has water in it. The washing alongside rose up with a hollow note off the bends, and whenever there was a moment's stillness aboard, by straining your ear, you'd catch, as it might be, a sound of weltering water, a sort of dull, wet rolling and falling noise stealing athwart the wind out of the distance, though it seemed as much on one hand as the other, and over the bows, too, for that matter. I know it was weather that would have made me feel anxious had Pipes been with us and his two mates and our whole ship's company. To face it in the condition to which we were reduced was a thing that would not bear thinking about ; plenty of physical bustle and all the activity one could work into one's mind were what one needed at such a moment, and with the view of making a start in this way, I sung out to the Finn, who, pipe in mouth, was half lolling, half crouching, in the laziest attitude a man could telescope his body into under the bulwarks abreast of the galley, " I say, Grondhal, isn't it about time we all turned to ? You don't want the masts to be taken out of the ship, do you ? There's been another fall in the glass since I was last below, and we may have a gale of wind upon us at any moment."

He stared lazily at me, as though he had been dozing, and then slowly getting on his legs, he exclaimed to the others, who were lying about the deck near him, " Vot shay, poys ? sholl ve make a peginning ? "

I heard some grumbling and expostulating, but could not catch what was said. I walked aft to the wheel, and exclaimed, " They're hanging back, Nipper. You'd better go forward and see what you can do to get them to turn to."

He let go the spokes, spat over the rail, and said, " If sail's to be shortened, it had best be done when it may be done. There's a look down yonder that makes me reckon it'll be blowing some of us off the yards if it can only kitch us up there." And I heard him mutter between his teeth, " They're a nice lot, damn *me*," as he went towards them.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WE ARE AGAIN BECALMED.

IN spite of Nipper's going among them, another ten minutes passed before the men bestirred themselves. My anxiety was then greatly relieved by seeing them lay hold of the fore-clew-garnets and haul the sail up to the yard. My fear had been throughout that if the fall in the aneroid and the darkness indicated a gale, and if that gale struck us suddenly we should be dismasted; in which case our chance of getting home might be postponed till God knows what date, if indeed we managed to come off with our lives; though I may confess that the prospect of being boxed up in a dismasted hull, with the Finn and the others for it was impossible to say how long, was really more horrible to me than the idea of our being rendered helpless, and washing about until we were picked up or sank.

With the exception of Grondhal and Nipper, the fellows went to work like men who would much rather see things take their chance than that they should be called upon to fatigue themselves. They talked a good deal when they were on the yard, and all their movements were very slow, so that I thought they would never make an end of rolling up the foresail. When this was at last done, the three seamen went on to the topgallant yard, leaving the idlers to let go the halliards and clew the sail up. They were their own masters in respect of shortening sail. They knew that the glass was low and falling, and they could read the sky better than I, and would be the best judges of the canvas the ship ought to be reduced to. I therefore offered no suggestions, but contented myself with steering the vessel and watching them, though privately my opinion was that, since they were at work, they could not do better than go on furling till nothing was left set but the lower topsails.

There were few things odder in all this time than the feeling that there was no captain, no head. This came home strong to me as I stood at the wheel and looked at the few figures doing the work, and considered how I, who knew almost nothing about navigation, had yet accepted the responsibility of steering the *Silver Sea* to port, whilst the men were left to their own laziness and indifference to act as their knowledge of seamanship—and Heaven alone knows how much of *this* they had among them—should direct them in the practical working of the ship. You must think of yourself as a passenger who looks to the captain for everything—for safety, for dispatch, for comfort, and the like—and who knows as little of the crew as the place in which they sleep and the food they eat, to understand my feelings at that time. I was no sailor. I *had indeed* strong sympathies with the sea and the calling of the sea; but when it came to such a pass as we were now in, when it came

to difficulties, insolence, and loafing among the men, the perils of weather and of a navigation to be practised by the clumsiest and most erring of all methods, my ignorance only made me fit to look on. I believe I appreciated our situation even more keenly than Miss Inglefield ; for I stood between her and the ship and all that the ship meant, whereas between me and our position there was nothing, there was nobody's eyes but my own through which I could look at it, and I particularly remember feeling, as I stood watching the men, that every grain of common-sense, of pure, practical judgment that there was in me, I should need to make good my heavy marine deficiencies if I was to be the instrument, not so much of carrying the *Silver Sea* to Pernambuco as of getting Miss Agnes and myself out of the mess into which this unfortunate voyage had plunged us.

Whilst two of the men were upon the jibboom furling the inner jib and the others were clewing up the mizzen-topgallant sail, the wind died completely out, and I saw the sulky swell go glazing off in the wake of the expiring draught till the folds heaved as smooth as oil from one dusky distance into another. The compressed and swollen bodies of vapour above somehow took a more forbidding look from the glassy, leaden-hued rolling waters under them. One could just make out innumerable outlines among them of cloud upon cloud, one overlooking another, but all dim and grim in the slatey tint that seemed to rise up over them from the vaporious ring round the sea-line, though in the centre of the mass—right over our royal-mastheads it seemed—where the stuff hung with a stoop in it, the shade was some degrees lighter, as though the clouds *there* were catching a faintness of light from a fairer day beaming leagues out of our sight behind the horizon. The rolling of our ship gave a wild look to her stripped yards and masts above the crosstrees ; they swayed black as ink with a forlorn sweeping that made one instinctively listen for some wailing of wind to come down out of the rigging. The flapping of the topsails threw a troubled note on deck, and, as they filled out and sank in, the white of them against the sky had the spectral appearance of surf breaking desolately under a wintry heaven of grey.

When the men had furled the mizzen-topgallant sail they were evidently resolved to do no more for a bit. The cook pulled out his pipe and threw himself down on the main-hatch with great ostentation of fatigue, whilst the steward mopped his brow and fanned himself, and Eye lighted a pipe and laid himself at full length on his back. Nipper coiled some ropes away over the pins, and Grondhal, leaning his arms upon the rail, stared about as if studying the weather.

Presently the under-steward came aft and went into the cabin, and in a few moments reappeared with a basket of bottles of beer and a tumbler or two. The sight of this drink rendered the men *active enough* ; they sprang around the German, and were soon

tossing glass after glass down their throats till the bottles were empty. Whilst the Finn was drinking, he held up his tumbler to win my attention, and then sang out, "Vill you hov some, Mishter Aubyn?" I called back that it was too soon after breakfast for me to drink beer; but I took care to thank him, as though gratified by his honouring me with his notice. And here let me say that, though as man to man I should not have stood in the least fear of this hulking foreigner, yet as I could plainly see that he had obtained an ascendancy over the others, even over Nipper for all I knew, and as I suspected him to be able to tell more about Pipes's disappearance than he would be at all willing to own, and as that suspicion made me fully believe him capable of any mean, devilish, murderous trick, I conceived it was my policy, both for Miss Agnes's and my own sake, to remain on good terms with him till we reached port, greatly as my sense of self-respect suffered from every civil word I gave the fellow. I say this, because I do not want you to believe that I was afraid of this man individually, nor that, if I had been officer of a ship, and he one of my watch, I should have scrupled to show him the ropes with my fist or any more home-going weapon had the need arisen.

Nipper took but one glass of ale; the others drunk it, turn and turn about, till all the bottles had been pitched overboard. They made out about three glasses a-piece, not enough to muddle them on top of the hearty breakfast they had eaten, though it increased their laziness, for they all lay down as if with the intention of going to sleep. There was no steering needed now; the ship had lost way and was slewing to starboard with the swell; so to save myself the fatigue of holding the wheel, I secured it with the end of a rope over a spoke, and, lighting a cigar, sat myself down on the grating close to the helm ready for what might come. I should have been better pleased to see the ship under lower-topsails, for in that trim she would have been like a half-naked pugilist, ready for the wildest encounter; but thanks to the admirable invention of the double topsail yards, we were even now snug enough to be under safe canvas for almost any extremity; for should the gale come on suddenly, there was nothing to do but to let go the upper topsail halliards, and the vessel would then practically be under close-reefed topsails, whilst the main-topgallant sail might be left to blow away. These thoughts relieved my anxiety as I sat looking along the heaving and swaying decks and at the recumbent figures of the men, who lay near one another in various postures all very quiet, and some of them still awake, as I knew by the tobacco smoke issuing from their lips, with Nipper among them, who'd sometimes prop himself up on his elbows to take a look aft at me, and then a glance aloft at the topsails and the sky past them. I was pretty sure by his manner that had the wheel needed holding *he would have relieved me at it, and I also thought it likely enough that if he acted as the others did, it was rather with the wish to*

keep up the shipmate feeling between him and them—without which freemason-like sentiment a man is a despised, neglected, and unhappy wretch aboard a ship—than because he thought them right in their free-and-easy theories.

All at once the cook got right up, and, drying his face, emptied his pipe, and came to one of the hencoops. He stooped down and began to dodge about among the fowls in it, and, after a good deal of cursing and groping, hauled out three birds. The cries they raised as he carried them forward startled the men, who jumped up to see what was happening; at the same moment a glare of lightning, as vivid and as startling in its suddenness and power as if the contents of a gunpowder factory had exploded over the ship, flashed up the huge shapes of the motionless clouds from the horizon to the zenith, and for a breathless moment the whole fabric of the vessel and the swelling and rolling surface of the sea were steeped in a strong violet blaze that drowned the dusky daylight, and then left it the gloomier for the illumination. Thunder followed after a short interval in a leaping of sounds that might have passed for successive shots from a dozen great guns discharged from the heart of as many precipices in a mountainous range. The last explosion died out in a moan, and the painful silence which the ear found in the atmosphere and upon the sea was scarcely broken by the beating of the canvas and the straining sounds of rigging tautened by the weight of sloping masts.

A few drops of rain fell large enough to spot the decks with dark circles as big as five-shilling bits. The thunder made the men restless, particularly the German under-steward, who stood up and came round to the port side of the mainmast as though he would put the shelter of that spar betwixt him and the next flash of lightning. Grondhal, stepping back to the bulwarks and shading his eyes as he looked aloft, cried out, "I shay, my lats, shall ve furl der torgallan's'l before it cooms?"

Nipper answered, "Ay; better now than when it's up to a man's waist in the lee scuppers."

On this they let go the halliards, seized hold of the clewlines, and then Grondhal and Nipper went aloft to stow the sail, after telling the others to let go the upper mizzen-topsail halliards.

I was not so apprehensive now of a sudden outfly of wind as I had been. I thought perhaps that, after all, the fall of the glass and the massing together of the clouds might betoken nothing more than a heavy tropical thunderstorm. At all events, if wind was coming, there was no sign as yet of its approach in any lifting or thinning or scattering of the evil-looking darkness around the sea-line, peer where I would.

I told Eye to see to the helm whilst I ran below for an oil-skin coat. Miss Agnes was seated at the table upon which were the breakfast things untouched, though the under-steward had been in the cabin since we finished the meal, and her attitude suggested

uncertainty and alarm. She ran up to me and exclaimed, "I do not like to go on deck for fear of being in the way, as I hear the men at work ; but it is very lonely down here, and I can't tell you how dreadful the feeling of loneliness was made by that flash of lightning just now. It filled the whole cabin. It seemed as if the ship was on fire."

"And yet," I exclaimed, "it will not do for you to come on deck. Some drops fell awhile since pretty nearly as big as hen's eggs—an earnest of what's coming. Hark to that now!" I cried, as all on a sudden down plumped a tremendous fall of water from the clouds, ploughing along the decks with a roar that might very well have passed for another peal of thunder. I jumped on to the table to close the after skylight, through which the rain was pouring in a drenching stream, and such was the weight of the wet that I saw the spray of it rising in a white cloud for all the world like steam oozing up through the decks as smoke does from a dunghill. Another near flash of lightning blazed in a blue dazzle around the cabin, and then came a crash of thunder that set the breakfast things rattling on the table, as though we were in shoal water and a convulsion of the earth had happened just under our keel. The explosion seemed to strike the atmosphere a shattering blow, the rain instantly ceased, and when the thunder had growled itself out one heard nothing but the sluicing of water through the scupper holes, and the cascading of it on to the deck from the tops and yards on which the sails were furled, and wherever else it could collect.

This put an end to Miss Agnes's wish to leave the cabin. I advised her to take a book and occupy her mind, and I said hurriedly a few things which I thought would comfort her ; I then ran to get my waterproofs and hastened on deck, fearful that the men would think me afraid of the storm, and skulking below away from it if I delayed my return. I found all hands but the German under-steward on the upper mizzen-topsail yard ; he was holding the wheel, and said he had stopped on deck to do that. I answered, "You can jump aloft now ; I'll see to the helm."

"Oh," he exclaimed, with an ashen face and a terrified glance at the sky, "dey von't vant me now ;" and so saying he sneaked off forwards, and I lost sight of him.

The lightning appeared to have welded the clouds all together ; I couldn't distinguish the faintest outline or break. The dome was just a concavity of lead, here and there made hideous and malignant by a sulphur-coloured, feathery bit of vapour, which came out sickly and leprous-like upon the storm-charged, sullen, stagnant, ground. The atmosphere was so dim with the dusk in it that the normal horizon could scarcely be seen, and the swells in the oppressive light looked twice as big as they were as they came slowly *heaving along* as though struggling to resist the impulse that kept *them rolling*. Sailors may say what they like, but for my part I

can't conceive of many situations at sea capable of putting unpleasant sensations into a man than the being becalmed in a ship in the middle of the ocean under a ponderous thundercloud that covers the sky and flings a twilight gloom upon the deep. You feel like a mark to be shot at, and the only one for hundreds of miles perhaps, and you never can tell when the next flash comes what will be the effect of it, not only upon the ship, but upon the eyes, limbs, or lives of the men at work aloft or about the decks. Strangely enough, however, there was no more lightning. The men came down from the mizzen-topsail yard and went forward to furl the upper fore-topsail. They were no doubt alarmed by the appearance of the sky, otherwise I question if they would have troubled themselves to such an extent on their own responsibility. The Finn paused to call out, "I shay, Mishter Aubyn, ven's the vind accomin'?" I answered, "We shall have it; you are wise to snug her down: she is very nearly ready for the worst now." Yet there was no more lightning, though it was startling to look up and observe the overcharged heart of the massive shroud of vapour; it was wonderful, I say, to find it withholding its fierce fires and keeping silent the deafening peals of thunder which one felt must inevitably attend the rending and the throes of the sooty, hellish accumulation of electrical stuff.

By the time the men had rolled up the upper fore-topsail they had probably got to think less ill of the appearance of the weather, no doubt because the lightning had ceased and there was no sign of wind anywhere around. They came down on deck, and instead of going to work with the upper main-topsail, they filled their pipes and looked about them for dry lounging spots for a smoke, whilst the cook entered the galley to prepare a good dinner for them, and the German under-steward came aft for more bottles of beer. It does not take very much beer to make men drunk, and I did not at all like to see a second basket of bottles going forward. Still I felt that I had no right to complain as yet. The men had the run of the ship, they were masters of her, there was no one to stop them from doing what they pleased, and yet so far they had not entered the cabin, they had voluntarily attended to the safety of the vessel; and if they had begun to help themselves to what was good in the way of eating and drinking on board, they had not gone gluttonously and madly to work, as many might have done on being tempted by the profusion our stores offered. Hence I was determined not to allow myself to be alarmed by any behaviour of theirs this side of excess; though for all that it created anything but agreeable feelings in one's mind, I can assure you, to watch the fellows flourishing the black bottles at their lips with red and sweating faces, and then glance up at the blind and dusky sky stooping its thunder-laden darkness to our mastheads as though it would crush us, and at our stormy-looking, naked spars sullenly waving upon the swell as though the whole fabric knew its helplessness and

was awaiting whatever was to come with sulky, contemptuous indifference.

I waited patiently until they had fully refreshed themselves with tobacco and ale, and then called to know if they meant to furl the upper main-topsail. Grondhal, who regularly converted himself into spokesman for the rest, answered by asking me if I did not think the ship snug enough?

"You know more about it than I," I replied; "if you think the ship fit to meet whatever may come, I am satisfied."

"Who's to know, when all's said and done, whether more's to happen than the thunder and lightning we've already had?" cried Eye.

I shrugged my shoulders and said, "It may be as you say. This stuff may pass and leave fine weather behind it. I have been guided by the glass and the appearance of the sky, men."

"Don't let there be no mistake about yonder muck sinnifying nothen," sang out Nipper with a sweep of the hand. "Something's bound to come, so stand by, says I."

"Vell, let it coom, und vehn it cooms it'll be time to do vot's proper. Ve've had a pellyful of furlin', und dom'd if I wants more joost now," growled the Finn in a voice perfectly audible to me, though I was near the wheel and he was close to the main hatch.

This speech was evidently to the taste of all of them but Nipper, who filled and lighted another pipe without any of the grins and nods and exclamations with which the others greeted the Finn's views. I now called out to one of them to relieve me at the wheel. It proved to be Eye's "trick," and after a little, and with a great air of reluctance, he stepped aft and seated himself on the grating over the tiller, muttering something about not being able to see the good of tending the helm in a calm. All this while I had been expecting the ponderous and malignant-looking stretch of vapour overhead to burst into a furious storm; but more than half an hour had passed since the second stroke of lightning had flashed upon us, and this had not been followed by the least gleam nor faintest, most distant hum of thunder, so that I really did not know what to think when I looked up and saw the dense, oppressive, dusky shadow that overspread the sky, hanging there breathless, motionless, and stagnant, and watched the dark swells lifting their dim and leaden heads upon an horizon without a flaw in the gloom around it to denote the struggle of even the least draught of air for a passage. We were, however, all but in storm-trim, and nothing more could be done, or at least was seriously worth doing, for the present; so I thought I'd bring Miss Inglefield on deck; but first I went to the galley to make sure that the cook was not forgetting the cabin dinner in his anxiety to attend to his own and the men's.

The cook was hot, irritable, and a trifle the worse for the beer he had swallowed. When I told him not to forget our dinner aft he began to talk to himself in a grumbling, hoarse, half-savage voice,

asking with many oaths who *he* was that he should be expected to pull ropes, furl sails, and cook dinners for people who ought to be larnt when they went to sea and got muckin' about in the sitivation we then was in, that they was no better than anybody else, and perhaps not so good. The steward stood leaning in the corner listening and grinning to himself, and the German thrust his ear in at the door to catch what was going on. I said in a quiet, determined voice, "The lady and I will dine at two. A roast fowl or a piece of boiled beef will do. I shall expect you to see to it, steward, and I will also thank you to send that assistant of yours there to remove the breakfast things from the cabin table."

So saying, I walked away, feeling, nevertheless, more worried than I can express; for though I could not call this insolence mutiny, since the men could not mutiny against one who held no position of command over them, yet practically this piece of behaviour came to that as marking their feeling that they considered me in the way, and that I had no right to expect them to obey me or serve me, whereas I was still a passenger and had a lawful claim upon the services of the cook and stewards, if not upon those of the others. I remember as I walked aft to the companion, glancing at the smooth and breathless folds of the heaving waters and bitterly, indeed angrily, lamenting this calm that was delaying our progress to Pernambuco, and Miss Agnes's and my escape from our disagreeable and dangerous companions. I felt that the longer we lingered upon the high seas the greater our peril would become; because it was impossible to guess what thoughts might be bred in the minds of the men, when, growing used to the new situation, they should begin to cast their eyes around them, and consider that they were virtually masters of a fine ship, with a cabin pretty richly stocked with passengers' property, and a lazarette full of drink and provisions.

CHAPTER XL.

THE GALE BURSTS UPON US.

I LINGERED below for some time with Miss Inglefield. The German cleared away the breakfast things with a sulky face, but smartly, and then returned on deck with a couple of bottles under his camlet jacket. The cabin was extremely gloomy and very hot owing to the skylights being closed, but there was so little to choose between it and the damp decks and the scowling, dangerous sky lowering close to the trucks, that, as I have said, I found myself in no hurry to quit the cabin. There was a stormy swing in the swell as felt down here that one did not notice on deck. The becalmed ship had fallen into the trough of it, and I don't remember any *unpleasanter* sensation all that voyage than the sickly, lifeless,

monotonous rising and falling of the fabric with its interminable accompaniment of creaks and groans and strainings. What the girl and I talked about I'm sure I don't remember. It was all about our situation, I dare say, and how we should make our way home from Pernambuco, and the like; but not a word about papa and mamma, whilst on my side I took care to say only such things to her as were likely to raise her spirits; and, indeed, had I been utterly hopeless and despondent, I could not have helped doing *that*.

It's difficult to discover why I should have thought her so pretty and gentle and winning now, when in earlier times I should have been satisfied to pass her by as what is called a "nice" girl, and that's all. Maybe the presence of the stately Margaret Edwards was one reason. But causes of this sort of thing are of no great consequence. It's enough that the singular and dangerous position we were in was hour by hour bringing this girl closer to me. Nothing passed between us to mark that either of us was conscious of this intellectual approach—indeed we had something else to think of—yet, speaking for myself, the growing emotion had a direct influence by making me anxious about her, and eager to preserve her from alarm, and resolute to carry her in safety through our difficulties, and all this in a form that could not possibly have been so emphatic had she been a girl thrown by pure accident under my protection and without other claims upon me than those of her sex and her helplessness.

The aneroid showed no further fall, though the hand stood low enough to indicate that something formidable was to be expected. Yet I was already sick to death of waiting for it; and such was the disgust and weariness excited in me by the calm and the brain-thickening rolling and pendulum-like swinging of the vessel, that I would then and there have gladly exchanged it for the hardest tempest that could blow—ay, and I don't believe that I would have bothered to stipulate for the quarter whence it should come. I looked at my watch: it was twelve o'clock. I told Miss Inglefield that before we went on deck I would endeavour to find out the position of the ship by dead-reckoning, and, fetching the slate out of the companion, I went into Pipes's cabin, followed by her, and opened the chart and began the calculation. There was very little to calculate; whilst we had been moving it had all been plain sailing, and there was nothing to do but to measure the distance we had made and mark it down. There had been no leeway to bother me, nor winds heading us points off our course. Miss Inglefield, peering close with her blue eyes at the chart, wanted to know how I did it.

"Why," said I, "it's a clumsy though useful method called dead-reckoning, and sailors fall back upon it when they can't see the sun or moon or stars, though I am driven to it because, even if the sun were to shine all night, I could make nothing of him with

a sextant. Well, dead-reckoning is this: suppose you start at noon; every two hours you heave the log and find out how fast you are going; you enter this on a slate or in a book along with the course or courses steered during those two hours; by this means you ascertain how far you have sailed and in what direction. For instance, at twelve, say, you were heading N.E., sailing six knots; at three the wind headed the ship and she was E.N.E., and sailing three and a half knots; therefore upon the chart you mark a line equal to eighteen knots and pointing to the N.E., and continue the line by another mark pointing E.N.E. and going as far as she sailed on that course. Thus you calculate till you bring the ship to the place she was at when the log was last hove, and the course she was then sailing entered."

She easily understood me.

"Then there is leeway," said I, liking to talk to her about these things, for they interested her and took her mind off our troubles, whilst I found a real enjoyment in having her eyes on mine, and in watching her face.

"What is leeway?" she asked.

"Something you must allow for in dead-reckoning," said I, "when it happens. If a ship's yards are braced sharp up she has a double motion—one, direct progress through the water; the other, a sideways movement owing to the pressure of the wind. This sideways movement is called leeway, and must be allowed for, because, you see, though a ship *appears* to be sailing along a straight line, she is in reality drifting off at an angle with the spot she aims for."

This she also promptly understood.

"Phew!" I exclaimed, "it is oppressively hot. I think we might go on deck, do you know? and it's time also perhaps to see what the men are about."

A ship's companion looks aft, and usually the first thing you see when you mount it is the wheel; consequently the object that immediately caught my eye on emerging from the cabin was the figure of Eye lying at full length betwixt the wheel and the binnacle. His posture might have made him pass for a dead man, and it was that which led me to instantly conclude he was drunk. He lay on his back with his cap off, his mouth open, and his hands all abroad, and being a red-haired, ugly young fellow with white eyelashes and very grimy, the picture he presented was an extremely unpleasant one.

I turned to look for the others, but the only person I could see was Nipper, who sat up asleep with his back against the end of the port foremost hencoop, a jetty-black clay pipe, broken, at his side, and his head on his breast. I was pretty sure that *he* was not drunk, though the heat backing the beer he had swallowed might have caused him to drop off, and I was about to call him *when* I suddenly saw the wind coming. There was no great

weight in it ; I knew that by the want of white water and the comparative slowness with which the fore-line of its black shadow sank and rose in chase of the swells. Yet here was the wind at last, and what was behind it was only to be guessed ; for instead of the darkness in the quarter whence it was coming opening and lightening and breaking up as I had expected, it gathered on a sudden such a deep and angry tinge that I believe any landsman fresh to the sight would have found it almost terrifying at the moment, owing to the startling clearness with which it hove up the menacing outlines of the swell, and to the grim and stormy shadow which the passage of the wind put upon the water under it.

I called to Eye, but he did not move, and as he was in the road I rolled him some distance away with my foot and seized the wheel, at the same time pointing to Nipper and asking Miss Inglefield to step over and wake him. Luckily the ship lay in such a position that the breeze would catch her a point or so abaft the beam. I put the helm up, and whilst Nipper, under Miss Agnes's mild shaking of his shoulder—never before had a sailor man been roused by a softer hand—was staggering to his feet, the wind came breezing down upon us with a sullen tempest-echoing moan as it swept over the rail, and the *Silver Sea* was paying off with heel enough, despite the lightness of the outfly and the smallness of her canvas, to make me thankful to heaven that we were as safe as a well-snugged ship can render the people aboard her.

"Are you wide awake, Nipper?" I sung out to him as he approached me, wishing to make sure of his condition.

"Certainly I am, sir," he answered, with a stare of surprise at Eye. "And I'd ha' been wide awake all through if I'd known that *that* sort of thing was to happen," pointing to the figure of the ordinary seaman. And he was then proceeding to explain that the beer he had drunk had made him a bit heavy, and that as he had found himself nodding and nodding like a billy-goat in a cabbage garden, he thought he'd indulge—when I cut him short by saying—

"You see how it is, Nipper. Here's the wind, and it'll be freshening every minute, if I'm not mistaken. The yards want trimming. Better rouse the others out that we may bring the ship to her course. Every league we can make good towards Pernambuco is a gain not to be despised by men in our quandary."

"Right you are, sir," he exclaimed ; "though what kind o' trimming the others are capable of, judging by that there sample," indicating Eye with his chin, as a negro points, "cuss me if I can imagine."

He went forward whilst I brought the ship as close to her course as the posture of her yards would permit. She felt and obeyed the impulse of the wind almost instantly ; and one found a sort of glad buoyancy in her, that was more like the instinctive leaping of the spirit of a live thing liberated, than the mechanical movement of

an inanimate fabric, as she swung her shapely clipper length over the swells, and swept her gleaming topsails through the gloom with the coquetry of a beauty tossing the white plumes in her head-dress as she steps forth for the dance. But this was not an image to carry long in one's mind ; 'twas too summer-like and gay for the evil, menacing sky that gloomed away from overhead into the dim and writhing distances on all sides. If there was to be a dance, I reckoned there would be much less of stateliness in it than of wild, dishevelled, torn, and hellish galloping, with the thundering of a tempest and the crashing of maddened seas for music. This was my fear, at least. Of course I brought a pair of inexperienced eyes to bear ; but I confess I could not imagine that there was ever a picture of sea and sky fuller of dark and dangerous threats than what I beheld when I looked over the rail at the voluminous coil of the almost livid swells carrying the darkness of the storm-shroud overhead in their brows as they ran, and now creased and wrinkled, with streaks of white upon the slants, by the wind, whose first moans had even by this time risen into a thin whistling, as though there was a boatswain perched on each royal yard practising the calls upon his pipe up there.

I had watched Nipper enter the galley, and then lost sight of him. In a few minutes he came aft, followed by the steward, who walked very shakily, and had a stupid expression on his face. Nipper said to me, "The cook's in a drunken sleep on the galley floor ; the German's likewise in a drunken sleep, using of the cook's body as a bolster ; there's also the Finn, snortin' and not to be awake, forwards of the long-boat, It's the German's doin'." He took two bottles of brandy to 'em, and they've swilled it down as seafarin' men with swinish characters *will*. Here, stoo'ard, len's a hand with these here braces ;" and by dint of shoving the ropes into the muddled steward's hands, and elbowing him and pushing him about, he got enough help out of the fellow to enable him to give the yards the small trim they wanted. No sooner was this done than the steward lay down on the main hatch and fell asleep ; whilst Nipper went here and there coiling the ropes over the pins, seeing the lower topsail sheets all clear, the upper main-topsail halliards ready for running, and so forth, with many a lingering glance between whiles at the weather.

All this time Miss Agnes was standing at my elbow, keeping me between her and the prostrate figure of the ordinary seaman, whom she would often glance askant at with an extraordinary expression of fear and aversion.

"Nipper seems to be the only good man of the six, Mr. Aubyn," she said.

"Yes," I replied. "He improves as we go along. I believe he is to be trusted. Pity I found him asleep. Though, after all, he *knew Eye was at the wheel*, and there was nothing to do ; and if *he swallowed ale enough to make him drowsy*, one must remember

the temptation—the heat, the work of furling, and possibly his determination not to seem different from the rest, lest they should turn upon him.”

“He was not intoxicated,” said she. “He soon awoke. Oh, Mr. Aubyn, is it not possible to lock up the beer and spirits from the men—even to throw the horrid stuff into the sea? What is to become of us if the men keep on drinking themselves into such a condition as that?” said she, pointing to Eye.

I said, “The men are practically masters of the ship. We must look that fact in the face. I can perfectly imagine what would be the result of my locking away the drink—even if it *could* be locked away. And as to letting the casks run and throwing the bottles overboard——” I laughed and checked myself, as I was about to add that they might throw me after the bottles. There would have been no harm in speaking such things if there had not been enough of possibility in them to make them desperately terrifying to her.

Nipper came our way again, and was going to say something to me, when, marching up to Eye, he exclaimed, “Sol ’ud never thank me for lettin’ him make such a spectacle of hisself afore you and the lady;” and catching up the man’s feet, he dragged him forward along the deck, as though indeed he had got hold of a sack of potatoes, causing the fellow’s shirt to rub out over his head, whilst *that* went bump, bump over the planks, till, with a strong heave up of his arms, he rolled him head over heels out of sight, somewhere betwixt the galley and the foremast. The creature must have been drunk indeed to have remained insensible to such man-handling as this.

But a thing now happened to give matters a downright serious look. The wind had been freshening fast, whitening the heads and sides of the swells with its swift shooting, and flashing through the rigging and into the topsails with a sound that was rapidly taking the humming notes one hears in the first of a gale. The ship had a good strong way upon her, and crushed a mass of foam out of every hollow that she plunged into, whilst her keen stem ate its path along the acclivities with as quiet a seething and shearing as ever attended the sliding of a steamer’s iron cutwater. On a sudden, away out in the north-east, I noticed a faint kind of brightening in the murkiness there. I was staring at it, with my head on my shoulder, for it was on our starboard quarter—a trifle forward of that perhaps—when a flash of lightning, green as grass, seemed to chop clean down upon us from right overhead: decks, rigging, and yards looked to be one mass of dazzling emerald sparkles, and I thought we were on fire. There was scarce more than the interval of a breath between the stroke and the thunder-shock; it was just a solid crash without echo, as though a bolt had split the floor of the sky. *Instantly* followed a lull in the wind, and the topsails came into the masts with a shivering flap of their cloths against the spars as the ship, *still foaming* under her bows, swept up the swell that underran her.

Suddenly Nipper came rushing along, shrieking out, "Starboard your helm, Mr. Aubyn ! starboard your helm, sir !" Half blinded and half dazed by the lightning, I did as he bade me, feeling sure he was rightly directing me, though I could not guess his reason ; and even while the ship was paying off—boom ! down came a whole gale of wind out of the north-east—out of the very quarter in which I had noticed the faint brightness. It struck us at the moment the ship was dead before it, and it came with such prodigious violence that it literally pinned me against the spokes I was grasping, whilst God knows where it would have swept Miss Inglefield to if it hadn't been for Nipper springing upon her, and literally tumbling down with her under the shelter of the grating, where he lay howling to me to steady the helm.

The wind was full of rain, and spume, and drift ; the stuff drove past us in clouds ; it was impossible to face it for a second ; but one knew by the leeward aspect of the sea that the horizon had closed in round us, and that we were maniacally driving through a smother as dense as ever hid the city of London on a November day. I bawled to Nipper to hand the lady below, to get her out of the wet, to do *that* before anything else, and then return to me. He managed it ; but I give you my word, before he could contrive her retreat from the deck, he had to grasp the mainbrace, and put his arm round her waist, and so stagger forward with her, till she was in the companion ; and even when her feet were upon the steps, he had to hold on to her till he could close the companion to prevent her from being blown down the ladder.

He returned to me, hauling himself aft, and asked me if he should take the wheel.

"I believe I can manage alone," said I, "until the sea gets up. I'd rather you should go among the men, and endeavour to rouse them out of their drunken sleep."

"The wet'll be doing that for such of'em as aren't under shelter," he answered, with a glance at his streaming clothes ; "but I'll help too."

"Before you go tell me what you think we should do," I shouted. "Shall we get all the good we can out of this gale, and continue running till we can run no longer ? We can keep the wind quartering us with a true course for Pernambuco whilst it holds as it is."

He shook his head. "Heaving a ship to's risky work at the best," he said, "and I'm for doin' it before the sea gets up ; for even if it don't mean to come harder than it now is, I reckon the water'll be like rows of cliffs afore another hour's passed."

"No doubt you are right," said I ; "so, for Heaven's sake, Nipper, endeavour to get help, and heave the ship to, whilst we safely can."

As he was making his way towards the galley, the Finn came out from behind it. He lurched over to the bulwarks, and steadied himself

by grasping a belaying pin. He was apparently greatly astonished, and tried several times to look aft, but the screaming volume of wind flinging its storm of wet and spray into his eyes was too much for him. There he clung for a bit, combing the wet off his face with his fingers, whilst his saturated clothes, clinging to him like sticking-plaster, defined the massive and muscular proportions of the man almost as clearly as if he had been stripped. Very soon the cook came rolling out of the galley, as if thrust from behind, and I then saw Nipper tumble the drunken form of the German under-steward through the door. Suddenly the steward, who had been asleep on the main hatchway, sat up; it took him some moments to understand that there was a gale of wind blowing, and that he was soaked to the skin; he then staggered to his feet, but, being very unsteady, the violence of the wind instantly knocked him down. This went a long way towards sobering him; he got on his knees and hands, and, seeing the others abreast of the galley, he crawled to the side, and, by the help of the ropes and pins there, he clawed his way along to them. I knew that this exposure to the wet would soon sober the fellows. All now were in sight but Eye, though he was not allowed to lie long in peace, for, after Grondhal and Nipper had talked a few moments, the Finn went behind the galley, and re-appeared dragging the ordinary seaman after him, and then, hoisting the fellow on to his legs, which curved and swayed under him like whalebone, he faced him aft, and, whilst the gale and the wet flashed splitting upon the intoxicated creature, the Finn proceeded to shake him so furiously that it was wonderful his head didn't tumble off his shoulders. Meanwhile, Nipper endeavoured to restore the German to his senses by rolling him to and fro, over and over again, with his foot, as he would a cask. I was too far off to see the expression on Nipper's face; but I was pretty sure, from the reckless and rather vindictive jerking of his legs, that in his efforts to awaken the man he was influenced by other considerations than merely the wish to obtain all available help to heave the ship to.

However, it was more than twenty minutes before they were all in condition to "turn to," as going to work is called at sea; and they then came aft to clew up the mizzen-topsail, though only four of them went aloft, for the cook had scarcely scrambled into the rigging when, pausing and looking aloft, he shook his head violently, and dropped on to the deck; whilst as to the German, one could see him pretending that he was still too drunk to be of use, though it was plain by the alarm that the roaring of the gale excited in the skulking, cowardly creature, that he had regained a deal of his intelligence, and was using it as God intended he should. After this I hardly know how the men managed, for my utmost attention was engrossed by the steering of the ship. The gale was on one quarter and the swell was on the other. Already the surges had risen *as if by magic*, and were racing heavily and swiftly out of the north-east, and by meeting the swell at an angle they raised a

singular and savage sea, so full of spray, owing to the colliding of the liquid heights, that the ship seemed to be sweeping through a low snow storm, which in some of the wilder meetings of the billows would be hurled in clouds along the decks, and nearly hide the vessel. The dense shadow of vapour overhead was broken up, and, like the ocean, was heaving and rushing in grey and sooty outlines into the south-west. Here and there were breaks of light in it; but they sped and shifted, and vanished as though they were themselves clouds, and for the hue and character of these faintnesses, why, they looked more like the reflection of some gigantic lantern swung by the storm, and, touching the flying floor of the skies with the lustre of its flickering and starting flame, than the sifting through of the white daylight behind.

I had all my work to do to keep the ship before it. It was a sweating spell of grinding at the wheel with set teeth, and I often wonder how I managed to muster up seamanship enough for that job, since the handling of a ship in the situation of the *Silver Sea*—and a light ship, too—provides a man with about as ticklish a bit of work as the helm can offer. I grew bitterly impatient for the men to make an end with their work aloft; for though the gale, charged with squalls of rain which seemed to pierce the skin like small shot, prevented me from looking astern, I knew well, by the pitching of the ship, that already a mountainous sea was chasing us, and that if we were not quick in bringing the vessel head to it we might get our decks swept. It was the pitching, I say, that made me fear this, as I believe any sailor would who had stood right aft at the wheel as I did, and watched the descent of her bows till the head-rails lay like the rim of a floating saucer upon the slant of the huge surge that ran up with the bowsprit, and who then felt the squattering of the ship's counter on it till the water seemed to be boiling, and flashing, and seething level with the taffrail; and now it was you guessed that if the gale and wet would only permit you to turn and look, you'd see a cliff of water behind you in full pursuit, a mountainous fold that would make you feel no buoyant soaring of the ship could stop it from coiling its roaring head over her stern, and pouring its green and glittering tons of crushing and rending dead-weight along her decks. I do not wonder that shipmasters will sometimes tell men at the helm of a ship running before a storm not to look behind them. Nothing unnerves a man at the wheel more than the sight of immense seas in terrific chase of the vessel he is steering.

I was intent upon my work, watching the ship till my eyes reeled in my head, in order to "meet her" sharply as she wildly swung now to port, now to starboard, when a furious squall came down in a long, fierce scream that rang through the thunder of the gale with an edge in it and an effect I am powerless to describe; it made the storm of wind we were racing before horrible with its amazing, almost human, yelling; and it turned the sea into wool with its

fury whilst it swept a mass of rain over sky and ocean that was a perfect sheet of water just rent in a few places by the fury of the cyclonic power that was driving it. Our decks were full of wet in a breath : had we shipped a green sea we couldn't have been more completely flooded ; as the ship's bows shot up in the air on the foaming curl of a great billow, the water came splashing and thundering aft till I feared it would sweep me off my legs ; and then, as *my* end of the vessel lifted, away it went roaring forward, hissing and foaming round the companion and skylights, and flashing in lumps of white to the height of the bulwarks, where the wind carried it off in smoke. A yellow gleam of lightning sparkled across the blown and hurling flood in the air, though, if thunder followed, no echo penetrated through the dreadful and hellish crying and yelling and shrieking of that moment ; yet there happened then what might well have served for a thunder-shock ; for the lightning had hardly flashed when there was a loud report on high, as though a piece of ordnance of heavy calibre had been fired up in the maintop ; and looking aloft and peering with all my might, I just managed, through the flying and revolving bodies and clouds of wet and spray, to see that the shackle or seizing of the port upper maintopsail clew had parted from the yard, and that the sail was already in rags, thrashing the wind with a furious rattling sound from the jack-stay.

A thing of this kind happening made matters seem serious all on a sudden, though there was little to notice in it taking it as an accident. I could now see that the men had furled the foretop-sail, and were collected about the weather main rigging, apparently having been about to let go the upper topsail halliards. Nipper waved his hand to me with a gesture to signify that the loss of the sail meant nothing, and then all of them went forward and hauled down the fore-topmast staysail, so that the ship now showed no other canvas than the lower maintopsail. This was all right for heaving her to under, but it rendered running fearfully hazardous, for you must keep your ship sailing fast if you don't want the heavy, following seas of the storm you are running before to overtake and smother you. Mighty glad was I when at last the men came aft to brace up the maintopsail yard. I made Nipper and the Finn take the wheel to bring her to, as I was so exhausted and unnerved by my laborious and trying spell at the helm that I considered myself unfit for a piece of work that demanded coolness and judgment ; and laying hold of the ropes I pulled with the others, heartening them by my cries to haul with a will ; and after a little we got the ship to the wind, with her maintopsail full and fore and mizzen yards aback, though not without so much terrific plunging and heeling as to induce me three or four times to believe *that the vessel was capsizing.*

The sea, as I have said, had risen in a wonderfully short time. It seemed as though the swell had given the tempest a hold at once

upon the water. I almost hoped from the suddenness of the whole thing that it would be short-lived, for we were in parallels not often visited by gales of wind, how often soever the bellowing of the electric storm might roll its echoes of thunder through the tropical ocean-stillness. But it was impossible to look to leeward or astern—to windward you could not turn your face—without a positive feeling of consternation at the mad, chaotic speeding of the brown, dark sky ; at the mangled look of the sulphur-coloured lower bodies of vapour ; at the duskiness that would again and again come rushing over the whole roaring and warring picture when some vast squall-cloud swept up with its fire of rain and its long-drawn screaming of wind ; at the mountainous olive-hued surges rolling in monstrous processions out of the windward curtain of blind, unmoving haze, every gigantic billow as it ran pouring the long line of foam into which its flickering, cloud-darkened brow melted into the dim hollow beneath it till the imagination took up what the ear could not distinguish, and *heard* the furious boiling of that incessant oversetting of foaming summits into the swaying depths. No ! short-lived it might prove ; but if ever a storm appeared as if it meant to last for days, the one we were in did that afternoon.

We were now hove to, and the ship looked well up into the furious weather ; but, being light, her heel was prodigious, and at every roll to leeward one expected to see the water come pouring over the topgallant bulwarks, and to find the fairleaders in the rigging out of sight. The men stretched life-lines along the decks, the relieving tackles were hooked on ready in case of need, and the Finn grasped the wheel, while Nipper and Eye went aloft to cut away the remains of the upper topsail. I helped to coil up the ropes and clear the deck to exhibit my willingness to do all I could ; but I confess that the infernal hooting aloft, and the mad and giddy plungings below, almost took the heart out of me. I never dared let go with one hand. The surges had not yet mastered the south-east swell, the ship was hove to on the port tack with her head to the eastward, and the swell hitting her on one bow and the seas on the other, made her behaviour so mad that, viewed from a distance, she would probably have passed for a vessel tossed clean out of water and cutting the craziest capers in the air amidst the fog of spume and spray that enveloped her. It was not a time to think of eating, you'd imagine ; but the men thought differently, for when Nipper and Eye came down from the topsail yard, the Finn roared out to them that it was long past dinner time, that he was close upon dead for the want of food and drink, and that they should look into the galley to see what the cook was about.

"If ter fools," he bawled, meaning fowls, "are retty, you don't vait ter get your tinner, Sholomon, boot coom aft and relief me, too you hear ? ash I om hongrier nor you ;" to which Eye (who

was still half drunk, though his instincts and habits as a sailor had enabled him to keep his legs and hold on, and do his work aloft) waved his hand in token of acquiescence.

My waterproofs, which had kept me dry externally, had combined with my toil at the helm to drench me with perspiration ; so I went below for a change of clothes and also to see how Miss Agnes was getting on, feeling that terrific as the motion was, the ship was now in the only posture she was likely to be safe in, and that all the watching she needed could be given by the helmsman whom I was bound to trust, for 'twas certain I could not be on deck day and night ; even if I were the best sailor on board, which most assuredly was not the case.

I found Miss Agnes seated at the table as close to the companion steps as she could manage to get. She was white as death, and had a grip of the table with both hands, whilst the position of her body showed her to be holding herself in readiness to leap to her feet instantly and rush on deck. And I can tell you that the longer you had been at sea the less disposed you would have felt to wonder at her alarm had you been in that cabin. God knows the flinging and smothering was fearful enough on deck where you could see what was going on, where you could remark the size of the seas which ran at the vessel, and where you could watch her chances as she met and lifted to them, staggering and with her rigging screaming ; but below ! sensation was limited to *feeling* and *hearing* ; and I think the cheeks of the most lion-hearted woman the world ever knew would have been turned as white with consternation as Agnes Inglefield's were by the long and roaring upheavals, and by the swift headlong falls of that resonant fabric, and by the ceaseless thunder of the seas, like volcanic hills for their bulk and their internal raging, meeting in savage conflict on either hand, and by the startling shocks of blows falling along the whole length of the ship from the battering-rams of billows the beaten vessel was unable to heave herself clear of.

I began to tell her what we had done with the ship, but found it was impossible to make myself heard without exerting my voice in a manner I was scarcely equal to just then ; and partly by dumb show and partly by shouting, I got her to understand that I was going to my berth ; on which she sprang up and clasped my hand and shrieked to me not to leave her—she could not bear the loneliness and horror of that cabin, she said ; it had broken down her spirits ; it would drive her mad. There was so much wildness and pitifulness in this appeal, she looked so sweet and helpless, there was such a yearning for protection in her blue eyes now luminous with fear, that I just took her in my arms and held her to me, insensible to every consideration that at any other time *would have rendered me very cautious and reflective in what I did in this way.* She drew off from me after a little, just as a child *might* wanting to see my face that she might talk to me ; but she

retained a tight little clutch of my hand. Whether she believed I loved her ; whether she loved me, and in consequence was sure I must love her in return ; is a matter one needn't trouble to look into. All I can say is you would have believed us a betrothed couple had you then seen us ; though I well remember thinking that, after all, it might be nothing but the terror inspired by the storm that made her act as if I had her heart.

But this passage of softness—if there was any softness on her part at all—was mighty brief. We contrived to creep and claw our way to the forepart of the cabin, where the noises were less distracting, and here we managed to hold a short chat. I then withdrew to my berth, and when I had made myself comfortable, I looked in the captain's cabin and noticed with satisfaction a slight rise in the aneroid. It was scarcely perceptible, yet if the indication had any signification at all, it meant that the gale would not be heavier than it now was, and that the tendency of the weather was towards improvement.

CHAPTER XII.

I FIND NIPPER AN HONEST MAN.

How that black and bellowing day passed I don't very well remember ; it was all confusion and distracting uproar at the time, and that is pretty much the impression I preserve of it. Two circumstances, however, I can recall ; and the first of them was this.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon ; the early night that had come along with the flying masses of dusky vapour fell filtering in a sullen gloom through the skylights into the cabin. I had no appetite, neither had Miss Agnes ; but we had not tasted food since the morning, and whether we could eat or not, it was high time, I thought, that the dinner which I had with some emphasis told the steward to see to at a proper hour, should be set upon the table. I fancied by the darkness that it was later than it was ; when, therefore, I observed the hour, I determined to wait a little, for what with the cook having to help aloft and about the decks, and getting drunk between whiles and sleeping, delay was to be expected, both in his cooking of our dinner and the men's.

The time passing, I made up my mind to suppose that the crew were looking after themselves, and that we were to receive no attention. There was small use in making any fuss about it ; indeed, a fuss would have been impossible in a raging gale that on deck was blowing hard enough to make a man feel the need of keeping his lips closed to prevent his teeth from being swept out of his mouth ; so bawling to Miss Agnes that we must contrive to get a meal out of what cold rations I could come across, as there was evidently no cooking to be done that day, I scrambled into the

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pantry, and, by dint of carefully watching my chances, I managed to place a few eatables on the swinging trays, to which we mechanically fell to, eating like invalids contending with a distaste for food; for though the horrible tossing did not nauseate us, it gave my companion the throbbing and dull pain of a sick headache, whilst it oppressed me with a sensation of profound fatigue. Nevertheless we went to work heroically with the cold beef and biscuit, "for," shouted I, "this gale will blow itself out without leaving us better off than we now are; therefore we must keep up our strength, for our spirits depend upon that; and the only way to do it is to eat without respect to appetite. It is an art difficult to acquire, I know; we may not need to practise it after to-day; though there can be no harm in our trying to learn it at once," said I, sawing away at the piece of corned meat in the interval that followed every leeward roll, during which I had to hug the beef to keep it on the table.

Well, as I say, this was our dinner, and we were in this fashion forcing a meal upon ourselves, scarce able to do much more than make signs to each other owing to the straining and roaring, and repeatedly pausing in whatever we might be about—she in lifting a biscuit to her mouth, or I in reaching across to the swinging tray for a glass—to await the result of some sudden, dizzy, tremendous sweeping upwards of the hull on the rushing slope of an exceptionally mountainous sea, when the companion was flung open and the German under-steward descended into the cabin. I presumed that the steward had sent him aft to wait upon us; but as we had no use for the fellow, I told him that we had contrived to get something to eat, enough to answer our purpose for that day, and that he need not remain in the cabin.

"I hov not come for dat," he answered at the top of his voice, making his way towards the pantry by seizing hold of the handles of the cabin doors.

"For what, then?" I roared.

"For dhrink for de men's tinnars."

"What have the men for dinner?"

"Roost chicken," he bawled, and after some further manœuvring and dodging, he entered the pantry.

Irritated I naturally felt, that the men should have suffered the cook and the steward to neglect Miss Inglefield and me to the extent, practically, of our being without anything to eat for all they knew; but it was the unEnglishlike, the unseamanlike element in the thing that offended me most; for though, to be sure I was a gentleman and a passenger, and they might hate me for that, yet I had fairly thrown in my lot with them since our difficulties had come upon us; I had pulled with them, I had steered for them, I *had done all* I could to prove I did not want to shirk a single stroke of work I was capable of performing; and therefore, I say, I *had decome in a sense* their shipmate, and had claims upon them as a

shipmate. However, I said nothing to Miss Inglefield, who, I believe, had not been able to catch what passed between the German and me, and I was determined not to mention the subject to the men. Nevertheless, trifling as the circumstance appears, it greatly deepened the misgivings with which I viewed the Finn and his associates. Fellows who could behave so meanly, insolently, and even heartlessly, towards my companion and me, almost at the very outset of our troubles, would, I thought, have no compunction in treating us very much worse whenever it suited them to do so. Had Pipes really perished at the hands of one or more of them? God knows why; but it was *then* that the suspicion that that was so grew into a conviction, and it never afterwards quitted me.

There were bins and shelves and the like fitted up in the pantry for the storage of wines, spirits, and beer in abundance, to save the trouble of repeated descents into the lazarette. There were bottles in plenty, therefore, for the German to carry forward, and he presently emerged with a basket full, and bottles stuck in his shirt bosom and jacket pockets. Much of what he was taking consisted of brandy and whisky; I watched him rolling, and driving, and lurching about as he made for the companion steps, and then cautiously creep up on deck, clinging to the basket and the bottles with a semi-drunken tenacity, and the manner of a man who guesses he will be made to suffer if harm befalls his precious burden.

I met Miss Agnes's eyes fixed anxiously on me. Leaning towards her, and putting on the liveliest face I could summon, I cried out, "We mustn't allow their drinking to trouble us. The ship is perfectly snug, and if all hands made themselves helplessly drunk it would not matter, providing the helm was not neglected. I'll see to that presently. Sailors will be sailors, particularly when they're drunken sailors; and when the devil has hold of the reins, Miss Inglefield, one is bound to go where he drives."

But for all that, even, indeed, whilst I was talking to her, I had made up my mind to go forward among the men to see if I could not induce them to use the drink they had, by our singular adventures and misfortunes, become masters of, with moderation. The ship was snug, it is true, and in a proper posture to outweather the gale, and all the watching she wanted could be given her at the wheel; but nevertheless it was impossible for me sitting in that cabin, and feeling the wild, delirious heaving of the light ship, and hearing the cannonading and sharp and flying thunder of the gale on deck and in the rigging, not to find something to startle and terrify me in the thought of the men drinking themselves insensible at such a time, and leaving me and Miss Inglefield as much alone on the beaten foam-shrouded vessel as if there were no one else in her but ourselves.

I looked at the aneroid, and found no change. It was so dark *below that I found some difficulty in seeing things. I lighted the cabin lamps—there was fortunately oil in them—that the place might*

be less gloomy to Miss Inglefield ; for I reckoned that, if I was detained on deck, her nerves would suffer a severer trial than they ought to be subjected to, if she had to sit in darkness, and so feel the straining and leaping of the ship, and listen to the fierce, complaining sounds breaking out from every part of the tormented fabric. I told her it was necessary I should go on deck to see what the men were doing, and to make sure that the ship was being properly watched. She looked at me so imploringly that to soothe her I crept round to where she was sitting—for such was the severity of the pitching and rolling that she dared not leave her seat without support—and promised to bring her on deck if I found it practicable to get her there, and, if not, then I would return to her without delay. Indeed I said more to her than *that*, and with as much warmth as I dare say any young man would put into his speech to a girl who had cast her burden of helplessness upon him, and who clung to him with a fear of danger upon her, and a faith in him that made her manner impassioned, and whom likewise he was beginning to love, though God knows why he should have waited to fall in love with her until parents and friends had disappeared, and the captain had perished, and a hurricane was blowing. But the strangest things happen at sea. Human nature undergoes a certain change when upon it ; and shore-canons of conduct and emotion are exploded just as the conventions which cannot be practised are thrown overboard. I am thinking, of course, of such ships as the *Silver Sea* ; of your great steamers, full of boudoirs, bars, smoking-rooms, electric bells and lights, and the like, why, 'tis a mere hotel translation with such breathless despatch that old ocean has no time to make one feel his spirit.

When I crawled out of the companion, I closed it to prevent any water that the vessel might ship from washing down ; and then I stood for several minutes clinging to it with all my might, almost stunned by the furious pouring of the wind and the crashing sounds and echoes of the tremendous seas swelling in terrible, majestic heights and lengths out of the haze that stood about half a league off all around us, like a wall, and as impenetrable as one to the sight. It had been blowing desperately hard when I left the deck ; but since I had been below it had increased its fury by nearly the half of its former strength, spite of the improvement promised by the aneroid, and there was now raging as wild and terrible a hurricane as was ever encountered at sea. It was the right kind of light in which to view the dreadful warring scene. I have often thought so since, at all events, though *then*, as I stood grasping the companion, it was not the picture of the infuriated ocean that filled my mind, though I took notice of many details of it, but the wonder, the dull, impassive wonder, whether it was possible for the ship to come *safely* through these boiling and crushing folds. She was light in *ballast*, as you know, and she showed a bold side. Had she been deep, *I don't think* it would have been possible to see her : betwixt her

bulwarks, it must have been all foam from the eyes to the taffrail ; for even as it was, her clipper bows would take the lateral seas with a shearing down of the cutwater that brought the froth, white and blowing up and away in storms of bubbles and flakes, over the headrail, and one felt that had she dipped to the depth of another foot, the decks would have been full of green water, and every movable thing washed overboard or surging with bursting rushes here and there with the rolling.

You might guess what her dance was, by sitting in the cabin; but you could not fairly realize it until you stepped on deck and looked at her. I got a bit used to it presently; but till then my heart was in my throat, I could hear it hammering in my ears, above the gale, whilst I watched. It seemed impossible that the ship could climb the mighty liquid slants which came with incredible speed coiling their ranges of mountainous brows towards her, every towering head glaring ghastly with the white of its seething yeast against the brown and leaden and sulphur-touched sky; and then, when her arrowy flight was achieved and she paused for a breathless instant on the roaring peak to whose summit she had been swept, it seemed equally impossible that she could slide down the giddy slope without over-setting and reaching the dark and hissing valley bottom-up. I say, I got a little used to it after a while—I mean that my confidence in the ship improved; but the awfulness, the sublimity of the scene affected me throughout, as though I had just come fresh to the wondrous spectacle. The dimness upon the sea was that of twilight: the sky was an oppressive shadow, amidst which you could just make out the shapes of clouds flying with the speed of the wind, and, owing to their being torn in rags as they swept along, resembling hunted things scattering in their agony of terror to right and left, as the howling and shrieking and bellowing of the savage pursuer waxed louder and louder in their wake. There were three tints, as I have said: of these the sulphur-coloured scud gave the heavens the fearfully menacing look they wore. It made one imagine that whole squadrons of thunder-clouds were passing overhead, and that if it weren't for the hurricane that gave them no time to let fly, the sky from sea-line to sea-line would be one throbbing sheet of flames.

Nipper was at the wheel. No steering, of course, was needed. The wheel was secured by a "stop," or line, made fast to the stanchion of it; but for all that Nipper's hands were upon the spokes. I waited until I had recovered my breath, and I may as well say my senses, and, watching my chance, ran over to windward, crouched along under the shelter of the bulwarks till I came abreast of the helm, and then, laying hold of a rope, dropped down alongside of him.

"I'm glad to find you here," I shouted. "I hardly knew what

to expect when I came on deck after seeing the German fetch more drink for the men."

"I understood what that meant," he replied, bawling too. "I told 'em I was no sperrit-drinker, and that I'd take the wheel. I'm not a man to be drowned to please any number o' blooming Dutchmen. The ship wants tending. It blows cruel hard."

"She'd be easier under bare poles," said I, glancing aloft at the streak of main-topsail, and marvelling at the strength of the cloth that could stand the incalculable strain brought upon it by the windward sweeping of the spars against the hurricane; for it was at such times that the weight of the gale seemed double, and it was enough to split the drum of the ear to listen to the sounds which came out of the rigging as the masts rose erect from an angle that had put the main-yardarm close to the water.

"I don't know," answered Nipper. "That bit o' canvas must help to steady her, I should think. Besides, as to takin' it in, if ye was to start a foot of sheet, I allow the sail 'ud bust off into smoke. As it is, I've been expectin' any minute to see it fly out of the bolt-rope."

"Where are the men?"

"In the fo'ksle."

"Not in the galley this bout?"

"Why, they're afraid of the galley being washed overboard, and themselves along with it. It's a fear that's not unnatural, considering the size of the seas. If the ship was to fall off, high as she is, it wouldn't take long to clear every mortal thing off her decks."

"Do you consider that she is making good weather of it?"

"Noble weather. Look how she tops whatever comes at her, though some's as high as big meetin'-houses. Most of the water you see forrard there has blowed over into her. She's dished some, of course, but she couldn't do better if she was an island."

It was pleasant to hear him talking thus, and I wished Miss Agnes had been with me. One had the more confidence in his assurances because of his sailorly look; for *that* he had to a high degree as he stood, in oilskins and sou'wester, grasping the weather spokes of the wheel with the tiller behind him (reversed, as it is of course when there is a wheel) slanting up to windward, and, with its chains, lying fairly quiet, spite of the crushing submersions of the stern. We could hear each other without difficulty, for the heel of the ship sloped the bulwarks into a shelter; and it was only when she rolled to windward with one of her sickening plunges into a hollow, that whitened the hurricane for a moment *with the storm* of froth which swept from under her weather bow *and side*, right over her as high as her tops, that the claws of the *screaming gale* tore the syllables off our lips, and forced us to give *the backs of our heads* to it.

"I suppose," said I, pretending not to know, "that the cook has seen to the men's dinner?"

"Yes," said he; "there was baked chickens. I'd have had some; but when I heard the Finn tell the German to go aft for the lush, I reckoned I'd do best to take Eye's place here afore he fell drunk again; so I made my dinner off a bit of cold beef. Have you and the lady had anything to eat?"

"Yes—as much as we require; no thanks to the cook or the steward, though. I suppose they've made up their minds not to wait upon us any more, nor even to pay any heed to our being aboard. Nipper, they're a bad lot. I'll risk giving you that opinion of them. The Finn is the worst; the cook comes next; the German is a cowardly, skulking rascal controlled by Grondhal, and willing to do anything he wants; Eye is a young, drunken, reckless blackguard, a perfect sample of much that goes to sea nowadays. Of the steward I'm not sure, but I don't like his behaviour."

Nipper listened in silence, but from the energy with which he chewed the tobacco in his cheek, I could judge that there was heat in his thoughts. There was no more to be said for some time, for the ship was all on a sudden charged by a succession of enormous seas—four of them, I think—and when the first of them took her under the bow and ran her up, my firm belief was that she was being hurled sheer out of the water, and that she would spear the seas with her mastheads as she fell. Our decks were up and down when she rolled, and when she pitched I stood clinging aft, like a man peering down a steep slant of white plank whose extremities were buried in a boiling cauldron. It was wonderful that the men in the forecastle did not take fright and bundle up and aft, unless, indeed, they were already drunk or afraid to open the hatch. The hurricane seemed to put the whole strength of its infernal lungs into its raving, as these Andean seas rolled stately and terrific under us. 'Twas fairly maddening to hear the noises raised by the blast, as it split with a thousand cries upon spars and rigging, and swept—as though our ship had been hoisted into the womb of a thunderstorm—over the bulwarks when the surge had thrown the fabric to its summit, and held it there a second as though mocking and tantalizing the tempest with a sportive offering. It was an experience that made even Nipper's face a shade pale, whilst for myself some minutes passed before I could recover the shock of that wild tossing, and the effect produced upon me by the appearance of the ship when caught by these diabolical seas.

My thoughts then went again to the men and to the motive that had brought me on deck. Spite of much in his favour, I could not yet be certain that Nipper was proper to trust; but I was not sure that I might not help him into trustworthiness by forcing such *confidences* as I chose to impart upon him. So after we had *exchanged some words about the seas that had rolled by and the*

behaviour of the ship, I said, "Nipper, you know that the German has taken a lot of drink forward. Could I do any good, do you think, by going and appealing to the men to use the stuff with moderation? They will have felt what we have just come through, anyway, and it may have sobered their minds enough to make them willing to listen to me."

He smiled and shook his head.

"But Grondhal values his life; *he* might be got to see the sense of what I say, and there's no doubt of his influence."

He gave me a curious look, and then ran his eye here and there, chewing hard meanwhile. Presently he said in a voice which obliged me to ask him to speak louder, "If I was you, Mr. Aubyn, I wouldn't interfere with their drinking."

"Why?" I exclaimed.

"Why?" he answered, staring at me; and then speaking with a kind of fierce resolution, he shouted, "I'll tell 'ee. If they're drunk they're incapable of mischief. Keep 'em drunk and they'll do no harm. Otherwise you'll have that Finn workin' out the ideas I know he has regardin' this here ship; and he can't want men to back him when he count the cook, Eye, the German, and maybe the steward, among his chums."

"But not *you*."

"No, not me. Whether mischief's meant or not, I'm an Englishman, and never yet met with the Dutchman as I could make a chum of."

I put my hand on the back of his, as it lay like an iron knob grasping a spoke, and pressed it. The sense of what there might be to fear from the Finn and the others of them was so strong in me at that moment, that the feeling that this seaman, the best man of the lot, was faithful to us and to his duties, affected me as a sudden escape from a great danger might, and for the life of me I could not have forborne grasping his hand in the way I did.

"But what could this Finn do, Nipper?" said I, wanting to see if he could or would give me a hint of any project: for *that* might prove that schemes had been discussed and entertained.

"Why," he answered, spitting his plug into the air that the gale should carry it overboard, "they might paint out the ship's name and destroy her papers, and sail her to somewheres where they could sell her."

"Could they do that?"

"Mr. Aubyn, there's no telling *what's* not to be done by villins. Give the Finn the command of this here ship, and nothen he could do, no matter how impossible it might seem to me *now*—nothen he could do, I say, in the way of making her turn out a small fortune for him—would surprise me. I don't say he's a clever man, but *I'm sartin* he's no fool. Or then, again, they might wreck the vessel in some safe place, or leave you to sail her close to the coast of Brazil, and then scuttle her."

"What for?" said I.

"Why," he answered, "in order to make off with all the waluables in the cabin—the steward's told all about 'em. I heerd 'em—I mean Grondhal and the steward—calculating that there was enough things in the cabin to be worth thirty pound a man to the six of us; and this, said the steward, is without reckonin' what may be in the young lady's berth, and in the boxes which we haven't overhauled."

"You've hit upon the temptation I'm afraid of, Nipper," said I. "This fear has been running in my mind for some time."

"Ye can't do better than follow my advice, sir," he exclaimed. "Don't interfere with their drinking. Let 'em have as much as they can put their lips to. My humble opinion is, the safety of this vessel lies in Grondhal and the cook keepin' their hintellects fogged with sperrits."

"I see what you mean; but the ship's work must be done. Who's to tend the helm and watch her through this gale—"

"You and me," he interrupted, "as easy as lightin' a pipe."

"But when the gale's gone we shall have to make sail?"

"Yes, sir," he answered, with a look at the sky; "but let this gale go first. When it comes to makin' sail, there may be enough of us in our senses to loose the canvas we require and sheet it home. What I say is, don't take any notice of their drinking, but leave 'em to go on lushing as hard as ever they please."

The advice was too sound, and went too deep to miss of my appreciation. So without further ado, I dropped my resolution to beg the Finn and the rest to use the liquor in the ship with moderation; though I must own that I should not have been able to carry it out on that day, at all events, even had Nipper not induced me to dismiss it; for first of all, I question if I should have been able to reach the forecastle, so headlong and whirling was the motion of the decks; next, the sea would frequently fly in slashing sheets of water over the head-rail; and with such weight and force would these discharges be slung by the gale over the lee side, that a man struck by one of them was either bound to go overboard with it or be dashed down on the deck or against the bulwark in a manner to maim or kill him outright; then, to come at the men, I should have been obliged to open the scuttle and drop through the hatch into the forecastle, an undertaking which no one who did not "belong forrards" and who valued his safety would risk without the security of a very cordial and sincere invitation; and lastly, supposing these obstacles overcome, there was every likelihood of my finding the five men drunk. This coming on deck to exhort the crew and my talk with Nipper form the first of the two circumstances which I recall in association with that terrible day of storm. The relation of the other will occupy less time.

I remained a short time after conversation had ceased between

Nipper and me, mainly owing to the extreme fatigue speedily occasioned in the lungs and chest and throat through the effort of making one's self audible above the fiendish ravings overhead and the boiling and volcano-like sounds of bursting and striking and colliding surges over the sides; I say, I remained on deck watching almost mechanically the amazing labouring of the ship while I was lost in thought over the ideas Nipper had put into my head. Then bethinking me of my promise to return to Miss Agnes when I had finished what I had to do, I took a look round to see if there was a corner in which she could be stowed away for a short time without great exposure to the gale; for it was fearfully dull, nerve-racking work for her below, nor could I bear to think of her spirits failing her for the lack of anything I could do to support them; and further, I considered that if she saw the sea, and marked with what noble audacity and defiant buoyancy of spring and fall our brave little clipper was dominating the hurling, towering surges, the motion, when she returned below, would no longer terrify her. So, telling Nipper on what errand I was now bound, and that I would arrange to relieve him at the wheel when I returned, I went below.

I found Miss Agnes just where I had left her. The lamplight sparkling in her eyes made them look feverish with brilliancy, and the first thing she did when she saw me was to point to the lamps, a gesture I instantly grasped the meaning of, for she meant me to realize what the movements of the ship were by the mad oscillations and plungings of those illuminated globes. She had worn her hat and jacket all day, and was therefore ready; nor did she need any further covering, for fierce as the wind was, the temperature was so warm that under the lee of the bulwarks it was almost as hot as that of the cabin. The poor girl seemed overjoyed by my offer to take her on deck. Indeed, her fears had made a perfect coffin of the cabin to her senses; she was incessantly supposing that the ship was in the act of sinking, and, as she afterwards told me, the feeling in her was as though she lay in her grave, buried alive, and awaiting the moment when suffocation would end her sufferings. With much difficulty, and after great perseverance, I succeeded in fairly landing her under the lee of the weather bulwark, a little forward of abreast of the helm, and here she could watch the tremendous but weatherly and triumphant leaping of the ship, and see the immensely long, smooth, foam-veined backs of the gigantic seas rolling away from under the vessel to leeward and vanishing like mountains behind a drooping mist in the smother of haze and spume a mile or two distant. I could not help looking at her for real admiration of the expressions which *passed over her face*, as she gazed with a kind of wildness in the *dilation of her eyes* and with a cowering in her posture at the *sweeping jumps* and headlong hissing screaming plunges of the *ship*, and then with another expression at the reeling masts, and

with another yet at the careering heavens. I crouched down by her side, and was talking to her about our situation, and trying to raise her spirits, which her spell of loneliness below had greatly affected, when a loud exclamation from Nipper called my attention to him, and I saw him pointing over the weather bow as though he had fallen mad.

I jumped up and beheld, as I surely believe, one of the grandest sights the ocean ever submitted. It was nothing more nor less than a huge ironclad man-of-war, probably of a burden of six thousand tons, steaming dead before the gale with a reefed fore-sail and close-reefed main-topsail set. I helped Miss Agnes to her feet, and by keeping our eyes just above the level of the rail we escaped the wind that left a space of calm to the height of a few inches, owing to its recoil from the ship's side, and were enabled to see the vast steamer. It was a picture to make the perils of a gale that could create such a spectacle worth meeting. She had a lofty side, and an immense ram-shaped stem, with a profusion of gilt at the head of it, and her quarters were also plentifully emblazoned. She was ship-rigged, but her topgallant masts were struck, and her crosstrees and thick mastheads gave her a blunt, very heavy look aloft. Her short black funnels were abaft the foremast, and I could just make out a figure or two upon the bridge, but nothing stirred behind the line of hammocks, and had the bridge been vacant one might have taken the gigantic fabric as abandoned and commanded by the spirit of the storm before whose viewless power she swept majestic and massive like an island broken from its ocean moorings. But the magnificence of this sight lay in the motion of the iron shape. The creaming ocean reared high in her wake, and a perpetual storm of blobs and feathers of foam and the crystal rain of spray blew out of their savage heads like sweat from the brow of pursuing giants, and streamed in white lines and clouds along her decks; and as each overtaking surge brimmed to her counter and lifted her with its swelling thunderous volume, down would slowly drop her bows with the iron stem sliding into the dim green precipice till the mad foam boiled out to half her length away ahead of her, whilst the billow that was lifting her would pass in a glittering hill along her sides, streaming a snow-like cascade as it ran slowly, as though with labour, heaving up the ponderous bows and leaving the stern to settle out of sight in a hollow; and then you'd see the whole black massive length speed like a bolt from one of her own guns over the slope of white water her stem had hove up, with a long roll to starboard and then a long roll to port, whilst the tautest of her running gear stood out like a strung bow, and the spray rising like steam on either quarter, soared over her sides and met amidships and flashed up over her funnel and through the fore rigging as though it was the vapour from explosions in her engine-room. I can tell you it was a thrilling sight, swiftly

as it came and went. The sullen stormy light upon the furious deep helped it, for the monster looked as big again as she was, colossal as one knew her fabric to be ; and it would have made you hold your breath to watch the plunges she'd give with the black curve of her ram showing clear ere the leap was taken, so crushing was the blow she'd deal the chasm into which she sank ; for truly it seemed incredible that anything put together by human hands could resist a shock that created a very hell of waters where the blow was given, and that one could strictly believe filled the hollow with a sound that must have swung like a note of thunder down into the green and peaceful stillness at the bottom of the deep. She was gone before she had well had time to fill the eye, so great was the speed with which sea and steam were hurling her along, and so narrow the circumference created by the haze of the hurricane and the thickening round of the evening shadows. Why she should have been running in a gale severe enough, one would have thought, to bring a vessel half as big again to a stand, was a matter not worth the trouble of wondering at ; nor was it possible to guess her nationality. I thought her French, and Nipper guessed her either Italian or German. We were both of us certain she was not English.

Very soon after she had vanished, the dusk settled down with the promise of a dense black night to follow fast. I stood by the wheel whilst Nipper trimmed and lighted the binnacle lamp and attended to the lamps in the cuddy. The galley fire was out, so there was no tea to be had ; but this was no great hardship. I asked him to sound the bell, which he did, and found the vessel as staunch as though she were just out of dry-dock, allowing for the inevitable drainings through the coamings, mast-coats, &c. He afterwards went forward and opened the scuttle, and hailed the fellows below again and again, but got no reply. The fore-castle was in darkness. Thinking that he might as well have a look, he dropped below and struck a match, with which he lighted the slush-lamp that had been extinguished, as he supposed, by a cap or a boot or something of that kind having been flung at it. There was an insufferable smell of spirits in the place, and several empty bottles rolling about. The Finn lay in his bunk, with one leg over the edge ; Eye was on his back on the deck, with his legs on his chest ; the steward reposed in a corner, with his arms lolling along and his head on his shoulder ; the cook was in one of the lower bunks—that belonging to Nipper, indeed—and against this reclined the German. They were all motionless with drink, so stupefied, that though Nipper shook them heavily one after the other to test their condition, he could not elicit so much as a sound from them. Seeing how matters were, he put out the light, *closed the hatch*, and crawled aft to tell me that, just as he had reckoned when he saw the drink the German brought, the job of *tending the ship* through the night would fall upon me and him.

The idea he had put into my head about the drink proving a safeguard, by keeping the men too muddled for the plotting of mischief, caused me to receive the news he brought from the fore-castle with a feeling almost of satisfaction ; though but for what he had said. I should have heard of the brutish fellows' condition with horror and consternation, as likely to bring about our destruction should their help come to be suddenly required. But the ship was snug, the gale was not increasing if it was not abating, there was no labour wanted at the pumps, and, as matters were, whilst we remained hove to, two of us as a crew were as good as two hundred ; so Nipper and I agreed between us to take turn and turn about at the wheel, a space of four hours each ; he to use the cabin and lie down near the companion steps, where I could arouse him when my watch was up, by singing out to him down the hatch.

CHAPTER XLII.

SOME DAMAGE IS DONE US.

It was about twenty minutes before midnight, and I had been at the wheel since eight o'clock. Miss Agnes would have kept on deck with me till my watch was up, but I told her that she did not know what she was wishing for, that four hours' exposure to the gale would exhaust her, that even if she were with me we should not be able to talk, nor see each other ; and without much ceremony I handed her below shortly before eight o'clock, obtained some refreshments for her, and then saw her into her cabin, and returned on deck to relieve Nipper.

And now for hard upon four hours had I been standing at the wheel, the only man on the deck of that ship, with hearing dulled, and face numbed, and eyesight thickened, and hearing distracted by the pouring of the gale and the raging sounds of the wind and the sea. Such another time may I never pass again in this or any other world ! The feeling of supreme loneliness entered into the blackness and the warring of the night, and made the darkness and the noises and the ship's solitude horrible. I knew that the men in the fore-castle were death-like in drunken slumber, and that the two inmates of the cabin were asleep, or, whether or not, as good as asleep so far as my loneliness was concerned : and many a time when the boiling head of a towering sea would fling a spectral glimmer upon the slanting decks, I'd run my glance along the dim faintness of planks with a shudder that actually wrenched me, over the feeling that mine was the only living eye that witnessed this hellish picture of flying white and whirling black, and of our ship made ghost-like by wild indistinctness leaping and reeling in the midst of it.

The scene had been heart-subduing enough by daylight ; but it was frightful at night, because the blackness made the imagination

help it. Now and again some gigantic sea would render its approach visible by the dull and sulky flashing of phosphorescent foam that ruled its brow for a mile ; but for the most part the pitching and plunging of the ship was amid rushing mountains of ink, laced here and there with a gold or green shining, with often the opening and spreading of a huge bed of foam flung up by some invisible surge and hissing, great God ! as though the flames of a mighty submarine fire were being extinguished ; these monstrous creaming spaces would be full of phosphoric sparkles, which with the whiteness flung a thin and ghastly light that seemed to touch the blackness overhead as it went screaming past, whilst they feebly illuminated a circle wide enough to show you a procession of three or four lines of billows lifting with yearning reachings out of the darkness as though they were beasts of prey scenting blood and coming with coiling bounds towards the ship on velvet feet.

There was a lamp burning in the cabin, and the haze of it hung dull round the wet glass of the skylight ; otherwise the whole length betwixt the bulwarks was in total darkness. But a sudden leeward reel of the ship bringing a great mass of foam up to the rail, a weak glare came off the whiteness that made the decks visible, and in that unearthly illumination I caught sight of the figure of a man working his way aft by cowering and creeping along under the weather bulwarks. The wonder whether it was Grondhal put the thought of Pipes's disappearance into my head, and I remember thinking that if it *were* the Finn, he might, on finding me alone, endeavour to make away with me too, though I could not then conceive of any reason he would have for wishing me out of the ship ; but if this notion was strong in me—I mean that if the figure approaching me were the Finn, he might try to take my life—I cannot recall that I felt in the least degree alarmed. The gale may have toughened my nerves, or perhaps I reminded myself that the Finn was an arrant coward at bottom ; moreover, though I was not armed, I was prepared—he could not catch me unawares, anyway, and, as I have elsewhere said, big as he was, yet he was not the man to frighten me in a face-to-face meeting.

However, the figure turned out to be the steward, so that I should have scared myself very needlessly had I been frightened. When he was close, I called out to know who that was ; on which he cried, "Roderick Shingles, the steward, sir." I waited until he had dropped down close to me by easing himself along a length of main-brace, or some such rope. This brought him just inside the haze from the binnacle lamp, and I thought he looked white and terrified, though it was impossible to be sure of a human expression in such a light as that. "Well," I shouted, "have you recovered your senses ? are you sober, steward ?"

"Yes, I have slept it off ; I didn't take over much ; I drunk the *least of 'em all*. But it wasn't my place to touch a drop ; I ought *to have kept aft*. Lord Almighty, what weather ! Christ, how it

blows!" he yelled, as the ship brought her spars to windward with a mad shearing against the gale that was like whipping it into threefold its actual fury, and then laid her side into it with one of those dreadful lurches which caused one's heart to beat at fever rate, till the lifting of her masts again proved her still alive.

"Where do you come from—the forecastle?" I cried to him.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you close the hatch after you? If not, there's stuff enough blowing over forwards to drown the crew."

"I closed the hatch, sir."

"Are any of the others in their senses?"

"Why, I found I could wake up Eye and the cook, but they're too muddled to be of use; they was just capable of swearing at me, and saying it 'ud be time enough for them to turn out when they was wanted."

"What brings you on deck?"

"I woke up, and feeling the motion I reckoned it must be blowin' a storm of wind. But I didn't guess it was as bad as this. I found Nipper wasn't in the forecastle, and knew that you and him must be handling the ship, and might want assistance; so I came on deck."

"You're in darkness in the forecastle: how did you see to know that Nipper wasn't there?"

"Why, I struck a wax-light: I've got a box of 'em in my pocket."

"Let us mind," I bawled, "not to add fire to our other troubles."

"There'll be no fire through me," he answered.

I was too wearied by my long spell at the wheel, and too much disgusted by his conduct, and incensed by his neglect of Miss Agnes and me that day, to care to continue speaking to him: I could tell by his voice that his head was not clear of the fumes in it yet, though he talked with coherence. It was scarcely to be supposed that he had left the forecastle from the wish to help us two men: he had much more probably been driven out of it by fear excited in him by the overpowering motion of the ship, to be felt *there* as it was to be felt nowhere else in her; and there was also no doubt that he was now awed and horrified by the hurricane which he found to be blowing on deck, and was full of regret, in consequence, for having lain drunk and helpless through this perilous time. I could only secretly pray that if this were really the man's temper of mind, it might last; for it was he, Nipper told me, who had talked with the Finn over the value of the articles in the cabin; and if Grondhal found the steward turning his back upon the evil schemes they had very possibly already talked over, it might end in my being able to carry the *Silver Sea* to Pernambuco without hindrance from the scoundrels then lying drunk in the forecastle.

I pulled out my watch, and putting it close to the binnacle, saw that it was twelve o'clock. It was now blowing as hard as it had

come at any time since the gale had first swept down upon us. The sounds all about were absolutely terrific ; there is nothing in language to convey the least idea of the unearthly, piercing cries of the storm in the rigging, and the deep-throated bellowing of it as it came raving over the rail, and the thunder of its passage through the blackness under the sky ; nothing to afford the faintest representation of the appearance of the seas when they were made visible by the light from off their waste of foam ; nothing to intimate the character of the ship's motion as in blindness and darkness she scaled the liquid acclivities and rushed down the steep slopes, stunned with the roaring, fogged with the spray, beaten till she trembled to her heart by the blows of the inklike coils. Small wonder that the impression produced upon the thickened senses of the steward, who came fresh to this wild, black war, was one of terror. I left the wheel and called down the companion to Nipper. He answered my second shout, and at once came on deck. I told him that the figure crouching under the bulwarks was the steward, that he was sober enough to talk with sense, and that the others were in the fore-castle, some too drunk to come on deck, and the others too lazy. I also informed him that the steward was apparently greatly frightened by the gale, and might, in his present mood, be so influenced as to render him neutral, and of no use to Grondhal, supposing that man should hatch or had hatched any plot of the kind he (Nipper) had suggested. He answered, "All right ; he would talk with the fellow, and see what secrets he could get out of him, and if he could influence him ;" whereupon, feeling dog-tired, with a sensation in the flesh of my face as if it had been changed into sheep-skin by the continuous pouring of the gale upon it, I made for the companion hatch and slipped below.

One lamp was burning, as I have said, and its tremendous oscillations gave one a good idea of the rolling and pitching of the ship ; though the prodigious soarings and the swift, crashing, headlong sinkings—the fiercest and most terrifying part of the vessel's capers—the vibrations did not show. Feeling exhausted, I took a little brandy from the pantry, glanced at Miss Agnes's closed door with a sigh for the poor girl in her loneliness and a hope that she was sleeping through this hellish night, and then came back to the companion ladder to lie down at the foot of it. Here I found a bolster off a locker, with an indent in it produced by Nipper's head. It would serve me very well as a pillow : but spite of the carpet, the deck was a trifle too hard for my unseasoned bones ; so I made so bold as to borrow a large cloak which I had noticed hanging in Edwards's cabin, well lined with fur, and putting this down on the deck, I laid myself upon it, and, as I believe, in less than five minutes was sound asleep.

I had been sleeping for an hour, as I afterwards found out, when I was awakened—but that word won't do—I was shocked, beaten, swept out of my deep sleep by such a flood of water roaring down

the companion ladder as came very near to drowning me. There was an indescribable uproar on deck, as though hundreds of men were fighting there and endeavouring to smash the ship to pieces by pounding her with heavy spars and the like. The vessel was on her beam ends or seemed to be so, and I made so sure that she was foundering that I lay for some moments idle and indifferent with the sense of helplessness, feeling that if she was sinking, I had better remain where I was and perish quickly, than run on deck and be left to battle a while for life amid the black seas. But after a little she seemed to release herself from the weight or grip that was keeping her lee rail under, and I felt her swinging with a savage windward sweep down the slant of a great billow, the movement being accompanied with a thunderous washing noise of water, and of the scraping and rattling and banging of wreckage borne here and there by the tide on deck.

It is a fearful experience to be awakened by half a ton of water rolling down a ladder like a staircase upon you who are sleeping at the bottom of it. The merely being soaked to the skin was nothing, for the night was hot spite of the foul weather; it was the rude and brutal shock to the nerves which made the thing so bad to suffer. Knowing by the feel of the ship that she was still buoyant, I scrambled up the companion steps, and was on deck in less than three minutes after the rush of water had aroused me. One of the companion doors was open. I was certain I had carefully closed them both when I went below, and therefore concluded that some one had descended into the cabin when I was asleep and had left the door swinging, with the result of the cabin being half-flooded. The night was a shade or two lighter than it had been when I was on deck: I could see the wheel and Nipper standing at it, and rushed up to him, with the water streaming over my boots as I ran.

"In God's name," I shouted, "tell me what has happened—what is the matter?"

"She shipped a sea, sir," he answered. "If the devil himself had been tending her, he couldn't have stopped it happening. A sea as big as a mountain hit her in the bow and threw her off broadside on to it. Before she could come to, the next sea took her just before the main rigging and filled her decks. Her lee rail was under water, and I thought it was all up with us, as there was no one to call, no one by to cut the rigging away, if she didn't right."

"Where's the steward?"

"I don't know. He went forrard a few minutes afore the sea come."

"The companion door was left open, and it let enough water down to nearly suffocate me. Did he do that?"

"Yes, it must have been him. He went to get a drink of water, as he said. I took no notice that he left the door open when he came up."

"What mischief has been done, do you know?" I cried.

"I dunno, sir," he replied. "The lee-quarter boat's gone. Ye can just make out the frame of her hanging in the tackles. I reckon the ship dipped the boat clean under when she gave that lurch, and the water tore her bottom out when she was being dragged to wind'ard again."

By the faintness that had stolen, one could not imagine whence, over the night, and aided by the white water to leeward, I could just discern the wreck of the quarter-boat dangling in the davits; but forward of her the decks were all still buried in blackness like pitch, and the utmost you could see of the ship was the feebly glimmering stretch of the maintopsail, and the line of the rails when a chop down of the fabric drove the froth out boiling from the sides. But the water was fast draining off the decks through the scuppers and ports, which latter Nipper had opened after the flood of rain, understanding with a sailor's shrewdness the hint in that tremendous fall. There were no more sounds of wreckage being carried to and fro.

"Nipper," said I, "will you unhook the cabin lamp and go forward and see what damage has been done? And you might sound the well, too. And why not rout up those blackguards in the fore-castle? Will they be drunk all this time? It's about time, surely, that they came on deck and helped us to look after the ship."

He immediately went below into the cabin, but returned in a few moments without the light to tell me that the water was splashing about the cabin floor, and that Miss Inglefield had come out of her berth and was in a terrible fright, believing the ship to be sinking, and had implored him to send me to her. There was too much to be done to justify me in putting Nipper at the wheel and going to her, and so delaying the sounding of the well and the rousing up of the men in the fore-castle; for let it be remembered that the gale still raged, and that if dangerous damage had been done the vessel by the sea she had shipped, we should have to fall to work, without the loss of a moment, to save our lives. So I just went to the companion, and, putting my head into it, called to the girl and told her that she was not to be alarmed by the water in the cabin, which was owing, I said, to a wave washing over the ship; there was nothing in our situation to frighten her; I explained that it was necessary I should remain on deck; and I wound up by begging her to lie down again, and to be sure that should the ship ever really be in peril she would have me at her side to meet, with her, whatever might come. I then told Nipper to light another lamp before removing the one already lighted, and returned to the wheel. He reappeared promptly, with the light swinging in his grip, and shouted to me that he had stopped a moment to give the lady an encouraging word, "as she looked terrible white and fearful." It was a dreadful position indeed for a girl to be in: no one with her to speak to; no one to say a word to rally her spirits—to interpret those washing and gurgling sounds of water, those muffled bellowings overhead, those crashing and hurling noises which had followed the tempestu-

ous leap of the great surge over the bulwarks, that was fit, indeed, to have chilled the heart of a brave man ignorant of ships and the sea to listen to, in the loneliness of that leaping and flinging and hurling interior below. These were my thoughts as I watched the lamp carried by Nipper dancing like a will-o'-the-wisp along the deck, sometimes stopping, sometimes vanishing, then reappearing and lingering as though the sailor had hung it up. He sounded the well before he did anything else, and bawled out the joyous news to me that there was no water in the vessel—by which he wanted me to understand that she was not making any water; for some in her here *must* have been, since the ship had not been pumped out for two days, and a little was sure to have drained into her from the decks. But she was a tight, stanch craft, in noble condition, built as many vessels were in her day, and as all vessels ought to be; as, God knows, the most rascally of builders would be the first to swear to, if he had encountered that gale and felt that his life depended upon the honesty with which the man who had constructed the fabric under his feet had put her together.

The lamp disappeared after a bit, and it seemed as though it did not mean to reappear again. I had seen it glimmering abreast of the foremast, and then I lost sight of it. It was now I took notice that there had been a veering of wind to the extent of four points since I was at the helm, nor could I help fancying that the gale was blowing with less weight. There was a deal of phosphorous in the water, and the glare of it under the weather bow came off the foam at times so strongly that the sheen of it would tremble along the bowsprit. It helped to make more light, and it was possible now to catch a sight of the black lines of the fore and mainmasts. I pulled out my watch, and found the time to be five and twenty minutes to three. Just then I saw Nipper's lamp shining on the forecandle and in a few moments he was standing at my side. "There's been more damage done than I thought," said he, in a voice whose peculiar tone was distinguishable by my ear spite of his shouting. "First and foremost, the steward's killed."

"Killed! D'ye mean that he's *missing*?"

"No, sir; he lies dead as a drowned rat to leeward of the galley, with his head stove in."

"Heaven preserve us! he must have been hit by something launched by the water on deck."

"Ay, and ye'd know it if you was to go forward and take a look," said Nipper. "The galley's standin' sartinly, but the long-boat's gone, lifted clean out of her chocks and busted into staves. Most of her has washed through the ports along with the live-stock as I take it, for there's only one drowned pig to be seen. There's also about six foot of the bulwarks smashed, leavin' nothin but the stanchions; all the ropes, bein' lifted off the pins, makes a dreadful raffle with the *debris*, as it's called. I left the steward to lie till the others come up."

"Are they coming?"

"Yes; you'll be having the cook and Grondhal and young Eye here in a minute. They took a deal of shoving. Drunk!—but so much the better, says I. Better they should be brutes with liquor than devils without."

The steward's sudden death scared me, and I could think of nothing else, even when Nipper was talking of other things. It deepened the fierce tempestuousness of the night by putting an element of tragedy in it; and I remember the wild shudder that ran through me from head to foot, when I looked towards the darkness where Nipper had said the body lay, and thought of the man I had but a short while before conversed with lying there with his blind eyes fixed on the sooty whirl overhead, and himself but no more than a soaked rag in the ship's scuppers.

Meanwhile Nipper went on to tell me that the coops on the lee side had been full of water, and that he expected we should find all the poultry drowned when daylight came. "And now, Mr. Aubyn," he continued, "we've got but one boat; so that if we should be obliged to abandon the ship, we'll all have to go together."

"I hope *that* need won't arise. Haven't we had enough of trouble, man?" I cried bitterly.

"Well, come what may, she's big enough to hold us all, anyhow. The gale's moderating, Mr. Aubyn. Notice how the atmosphere's a clearing? Let the weather come a bit easier, and it'll be worth while to shove her before it, and take all the good that's to be got out of the wind while it lasts."

"Most assuredly. I've had enough of the *Silver Sea*, Nipper. She's a good boat, but after this bout, give me one rod of solid dry land before a thousand acres of shipboard."

"I've been a saying *that* ever since I first took to it," he exclaimed, examining a stick of black tobacco by the lamp-light; "but 'tain't of no use. Dry land's not meant for sailors, and it wont support 'em; so here I am." He then put the lantern down, and pulling the knife out of the sheath that lay on his hip, he cut off a lump of tobacco and thrust it into his cheek. I was speaking to him about the repairs the ship stood in need of, asking him to urge the others to bend another upper maintopsail when daylight came, and to patch up any injuries the vessel might have received, when on a sudden Grondhal, the cook, and Eye arrived. I had made up my mind not to say a word to them about their getting drunk and leaving Nipper and me to look after the ship; so when they came I remained silent, with my hands upon the wheel, whilst I glanced over their faces, which were perfectly visible in the light of the lamp Nipper held. "Here hash been a nice shob, Sharley," exclaimed the Finn in a voice as sober as need be, and with a roll of his eyes, which glittered like steel in the flame in the lamp, round the deck and out into the stormy darkness. "Not harm hos been done?"

"Why, first of all, the steward's killed," said Nipper in a quiet manner, though he had to raise his voice to make himself heard.

"How?" bawled the cook in thick accents, and recoiling in a half-drunken manner.

Nipper explained.

"Sarve him right for leaving the fo'ksle afore he was wanted," cried Eye.

"Where's the German?" I asked.

"Dead drunkenly asleep," answered the cook, with a laugh like a gargle. "Dutchmen can't stand drink like us Englishmen—eh, you old Roosian Finn?" driving his elbow into Grondhal's ribs.

The Finn tossed him aside with a sweep of his hand, and said, "Hov you puried Shingles?"

"No; he lies to leeward of the galley there," answered Nipper. "T'other mischief done is this: long-boat's knocked to pieces; lee-quarter boat's gone; there's a length of bulwarks busted out; and a'most all the live stock's drowned. That's the noose, matey. Now you've all woke up, what's to be the order of the day?"

Vot's wanted?" cried Grondhal.

"Why, sleeps wanted. Here's Mr. Aubyn fresh from a four hour's trick at the wheel, still on deck, as you see."

"Oh, vell, shir, you can go below," said the Finn. "Dere are enough of us now to manage. Is not ter vind shinking? By Gott, it ish not blowing like it vash?"

"I say," cried the cook, in his thick accents, "let's lose no time in getting Shingles overboard. Cuss me if there's e'er a ship afloat I'd be easy aboard of with a corpse in her—no, not if she wur ten thousand ton big."

"I'm with you there, Joe," bawled Eye; "no dead men for ship-mates is my motter."

I was wet through to the skin, and was feeling the chill of it too, now that I stood exposed to the still strong though fast moderating wind, and I felt extremely exhausted and sleepy also. We had evidently seen the worst of the gale, and I understood that for some time I was not likely to be of further use on deck; so contenting myself with briefly telling Nipper that I should be found in my cabin when wanted, and that I should be glad to be called when the weather moderated sufficiently to enable us to make sail, I walked below, carrying the lamp with me. Miss Agnes's door was shut, and I was glad to think that she had mastered her alarm sufficiently to yield to my request and withdraw to her berth. The carpet was sopping wet, but the water had drained away into the hold through what channels I don't know. I was very pleased to discover this, for had it lingered even to the extent of half the volume that had washed down the steps, it would have been necessary to bale it out; and I was exceedingly anxious to keep the Finn and the cook out of the cabin. I took the lamp into the captain's berth, and found a great rise in the aneroid; then hung the lamp up in

its place, entered my berth, stripped myself to the skin, and having fully clothed myself afresh, I threw myself into my bunk and fell asleep, after a short spell of wondering whether Miss Inglefield and I were to consider our startling adventures in the *Silver Sea* as fairly ended with this gale or only just begun with it.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

WHEN I awoke it was seven o'clock, and a fine morning. The sun lay bright on the cabin window, but when I was on my feet I could feel the long swell left by the storm in the steady floating plunges and regular rolling of the ship. I instantly went on deck, not very well pleased that I should have overslept myself, or been left to lie to so late an hour, and extremely anxious to see what the men were about ; for the wish to carry the vessel to Pernambuco and get out of her and away from the Finn and the rest, worked like a sort of fever in me the moment I was wide awake enough to be able to think at all.

Well, it was a beautiful morning indeed ; something that a man would not have dreamt to look for to succeed the thunder-shaken blackness and the storm-chased surges of the night. The breeze was to the westward of north, a soft and pleasant wind that turned the mirroring of the sun into a sheet of sparkles, with a round swell miles long, and of the tender blue you get often near the equator, rolling with flashing brows out of the quarter where the gale had blown. The sky was made somehow to look as far off again as one seems used to find it by the height of the fine-weather feathery vapour in the dome ; it was like a lovely kind of marble, in some places low down ; and the sea-line went round it clear as though it were molten glass heaving steadily under the heat that kept it liquid. The sweetness of the wind and the freshness of the glory that lay upon the deep lifted my spirits, and I remember thinking, as I stood in the companion a moment glancing round, that surely we must have seen the worst of what we had been fated to encounter, and that we might now look for a fair and peaceful ending of this wretched voyage.

The German was at the wheel ; he grasped the spokes awkwardly, and hardly appeared to know what to do with the helm ; yet when I looked into the binnacle I found the ship heading the course I had made out for her, and it was evident the fellow was managing to keep her to it. Glancing aloft, I discovered to my surprise that the men had got up a new upper-maintopsail from the *sail-room* and were bending it. But before doing this they had made sail on the ship, and with her yards braced in she was pushing quietly through the water under fore and mizzen topsails and

topgallantsails, courses, two jibs, and three or four staysails. This pleased me, for it proved that the men had come to their senses, and were making amends by turning to with spirit. Nipper, seated at the weather yardarm, immediately spied me, and waved his hand, calling down cheerily, "You see, we've lost no time, sir." I cried back, "Ay, you have done very well indeed. Can I help you in any way?" "No," he answered; "we can manage all right. There's nothing you can do."

I turned to the German and asked him where the body of the steward was.

"Oferbort," he replied, in the tone he would have employed in speaking of a dead fowl.

"Did you stitch him up and sink him properly?" I inquired.

"No; Grondhal fount him near der kalley and shawved him into der vater vere der bulwarks is proke," said he, with his bloodshot eyes on the card and a mulish expression hardening up his dingy pale German countenance.

I could not but think that this was just the sort of treatment that might be expected for a dead shipmate from such a sailor as the Finn. However, I was glad the body had been disposed of. The wreck of the quarter-boat still hung at the davits, and I could now see how completely she had been smashed and torn to pieces by the manner in which the wild and furious lurch of the ship had buried and then swiftly raised her. We had now but one boat left, though we had sailed from England with five; but our company was so reduced that our one boat was just as good as twenty would have been to us, so there was no need for anxiety on that head. Yet the empty davits gave the ship an uncomfortable, unfinished look. You would have known that something was wanting, even had you been unable to point out the need. The drowned fowls had been taken out of the coops, so the German told me, and pitched overboard; the coops themselves were uninjured, but there were only four live fowls left out of as many dozens. I walked forward and found a pretty wide breach in the bulwarks, and some of the remains of the long-boat lying about, wrenched and shivered in the oddest fashion, as though a number of workmen had turned to with all sorts of tools to tear and break her up. But this was the extent of the damage if I include the destruction of some pigs and a number of ducks. Aloft there was no hint given of the terrible gale we had come clear of. The canvas had dried and rounded out white as chalk under the pearl-like clouds; the trimmed yards ruled the piebald sky with their dead black lengths; the whole delicate complicated fabric went tapering and glistening into the hot blue air as unwrung and complete as ever it had been on the day when we mastheaded the yards on leaving Plymouth Sound; the only injury that had been done up there lay in the *splitting of the sail*, which the men were replacing as they hung *over or bestraddled* the yard, with their figures as clearly outlined

in that pure atmosphere, every tint of them coming out sharp as though they were paintings on ivory.

Well, I don't remember how long it was before they had got the sail bent, but when that job was nearly done, Eye went aloft to loose the top-gallant sail and royal ready for sheeting home; and by that time the topsail was bent, and all four men came below. I laid hold of the ropes and pulled to the fellows' songs, singing out myself heartily, for the weather and the men's behaviour filled me with hope. We soon had the yards hoisted and the sails set, and the *Silver Sea* once more looked like her old self, as she rose and sank on the swell and drove a fathom of the blue at her stem into a frosty seething glittering, whilst her three gleaming trucks seemed to pencil the heavens with their soft and sweeping motion. The galley fire had been lighted early, and when the cook had done his work he went forward to get breakfast.

I said to Nipper, "Well, the old ship has come through it bravely. The damage is very small, all things considered."

"Aye," he answered, "she's a good ship. She behaved well."

"Had she been a carko-shteamer where should we now be?" said the Finn, leaning against the bulwarks with his arms folded. "At der pottom of der sea where Shingles is. By Gott, I should like to hov der honging of some shipowners. I would not shtop for a block und a rope; I would shtrangle dem like dis;" and he imitated a man being garrotted by passing the end of a rope he snatched up over his throat and pressing his head against the bulwark stanchion. He seemed to find a deal of relish in this bit of pantomime, for he laughed loudly when he threw the rope down, and called to Eye to come and be strangled.

"There's ne'er a bloomin' Dutchman as would strangle me, not if he wur ten foot tall," responded Eye, giving the Finn a look in which I thought I could trace a great deal more fear than amusement.

I stopped the answer Grondhal was about to make by saying to Nipper, "The German tells me you have buried the steward."

"He was the undertaker," said Nipper, indicating Grondhal with a toss of his chin towards him. "He found him in the road and lifted him over the covering board, where the bulwarks is gone, with his foot. Poor Shingles is the first dead man as ever I see kicked overboard."

"Vell, und a very goot purial, too," cried the Finn. "Isn't dere verk enoff for us men widout stitching oop ted bodies und prayin' dat dey may live for ever? Vor my part, ven I am ted you may eat me, Mishter Aubyn, for vot vill it matter to me vedder I lie in der pelly orf a gentleman or de inside orf a fish, or in der goots of a verm?"

"What are you goin' to do with the watch and chain you took off the body afore shovin' it overboard, Grondhal?" said Eye.

The Finn looked angrily at the ordinary seaman and said,

"Vot's dot to you?" and then addressing me, "Look, Mishter Aubyn," he exclaimed, "how I sholl prove dot dat votch und shain ish mine. Shuppose Shingles hod gone down vid der votch in his pocket. Shuppose I did sweep for der pody, boot instead of finding him I did bring opp der votch. Vould not der votch pe mine? Vell, instead of vaiting for der body to sink I take der votch foost. Dat is good reasoning. Eh, Mishter Aubyn?"

"I can't tell you," said I. "I don't know the laws which govern such matters at sea. I should imagine that property belonging to dead or missing people must be handed over to the owners of the ship, that they might convey it—"

"Yash," cried the Finn, sarcastically, "for dem to shtick to! No, no! dis shild vos not pörn yesterday. Vot he finds he keeps. Eh, Solomon? vot do you tink, you tirsty rascal?"

Eye grinned, evidently not finding the Finn's mode of addressing him distasteful, and made some answer, the greater part of which was composed of fore-castle oaths. My presence was clearly no restraint. I might have been one of the ship's company, so little did I embarrass those fellows' language and behaviour. Meanwhile from time to time I would catch Nipper, who spoke little, steadfastly eyeing the Finn under his eyebrows. I turned to this man, wanting to cut the talk short, and said, "I'll go and relieve the German at the wheel, that he may get the cabin breakfast. I hope you'll see that he attends to us, not for my sake, for a biscuit and a pannikin of your tea would serve my end, but for the young lady's. She's alone, you know; she believes her parents are drowned. It's a hard lot to befall a girl on a sudden, and if she's neglected by you men, who are her associates, and in whose honour and humanity as sailors she is sure to have confidence, her case whilst she remains in the *Silver Sea* will become as hard again as it is. As you know, she might have starved yesterday so far as the stewards were concerned."

"Dot vill pe all right," said the Finn, speaking as if he were captain of the ship. "I vill see dot der lady hos plenty to eat. You leaf dot to me, Mishter Aubyn."

I laughed, spite of myself, at the consequential manner the hulking brute put on, though for all that I did not much like the prospect of his patronage, for I thought it might come to his meddling with us aft, in which case there would be sure to follow a conflict betwixt him and me, with God alone knew what sort of ending to it. Before going to the wheel I put my head into the companion, and called gently to ascertain if Miss Agnes was up. She immediately came to the foot of the steps, dressed and ready for the deck. "May I come up?" she exclaimed. "I have been waiting to see you."

"Certainly," I replied; "it is a beautiful morning. All the bad weather is gone. We are now fairly bound for home, and our troubles, please God, will soon be over." So saying I took her

little hand, and she stepped on deck, with a half-rejoicing, half-astonished look in her soft blue eyes, as though the sunlight that gladdened her filled her with wonder too; that it should be there after the black and terrible storm of the night. I took the wheel from the German, and told him to go forward and get breakfast for the lady and me; the rest of the men were either in the fore-castle or the galley, so that when the German left us we seemed to be the only persons on board the ship. There was a deal I could have told her had I been so minded; but it would merely have scared her to hear that all the men but Nipper had been drunk during the gale, and that I had learnt that the Finn had talked about the value of the passengers' property in the cabin and hold as though it was his intention to possess himself of it. The only bit of news I thought it was necessary to give was the death of the steward, as she was sure before long to miss him and ask what had become of him. Something of the same look of horror came into her face when she heard this as I had noticed in her when she learnt that Pipes was missing.

"Was he drowned, do you think?" she cried, in the half-breathless way she had when alarmed.

"Oh yes; drowned by the sea that knocked the long-boat to pieces."

"But did you *see* him, Mr. Aubyn?"

"Why no, I didn't see the body, certainly; but Nipper did, and there is no doubt he was knocked down and stunned and suffocated by the sea that broke on board."

"Could you be sure that he was not murdered by the Finn?" she asked, throwing an alarmed look forward.

"Oh no, he was not murdered by the Finn," said I. "Grondhal is villain enough already, we may be certain; no need to dye him red to the finger-tips."

This seemed to satisfy her, and then she took a good look at the ship, noticing the injuries the vessel had received with a quicker eye than I should have imagined a girl could bring to such work. We had much to talk about, and the gale of last night particularly found us plenty to say. I have scarce a stronger memory of our voyage than this standing with Agnes Inglefield on the deck of what might have passed for a ship empty of human souls but us two, I steering, she balancing her pretty figure with her fingers on my arm, the sea rolling and flashing blue and splendid on our beam, and the firmament unspeakably glorious with the truly magnificent shining of the sunlight that morning, and the trembling of the high star-like clouds through the effulgence that seemed to blaze. The memory is strong because I thought then we had seen the end of our troubles, and I can now look back and *perceive* what came after. And not for that only; and I may as *well be candid*, since when I sat down to write this book I made *up my mind* to tell everything that befell me and those with whom I

was associated. The truth is, during the half-hour Miss Agnes and I stood at the wheel of the *Silver Sea*, steering through the wonderful radiance that lay upon the violet heavings, I succeeded—I know not how, and could not explain how—in dipping deeper into the girl's heart than ever I had managed to sound before. After all, she had the simplest childish nature you could imagine, and that no doubt is why she let me see the feelings in her, without giving a thought to the fact that the veil was drawn aside and the light beaming full on the secret, plain in my eyes. I need not be reckoned conceited for talking thus : it's true enough, true as that the ship's canvas was pulling silently in the azure air, and that the folds of the sea might be felt through the sentient hull like the breathings of a giantess after a fierce conflict. If Miss Agnes had spoken out in clear words, "I love you," her meaning couldn't have been plainer ; and one thing and another had made me so willing to hear *that* bit of news, that I believe, wheel or no wheel, I should have had her heart beating against mine then and there if it hadn't been that the confession was of the pure, artless, unconscious, involuntary, childlike kind which no man who has the feelings of a gentleman and the respect of a lover can take advantage of.

Yes, these confessions will break through, spite of gales and rascally Finns and the hundred leagues twixt the slow, half-blinded ship and safety ; but they are a part of this sea-yarn, and will only fit in in their right places. Besides, how short were these passages ! these mere breaks of romantic sentiment amid the gloomy perils which overhung us ! She had scarcely "looked her love," ere the wand was waved and the whole thing changed, and there we stood talking of Pernambuco, of the dead steward, of the damage done to the ship, of the drowned fowls and pigs, as though, faith, Miss Agnes had been as fully breeked as I ; as though no other fancies could possibly arise between us than those which concerned our salvation from the dangers of the deep.

The Finn kept his word, and half an hour after I had taken the wheel from the German, he came aft with a very respectable breakfast of coffee and bacon for us, and this he laid out upon one of the cabin tables in the way he would have done it, had Hornby and the rest of our friends and the seamen been aboard. I fancied that his manner was a bit soberer than it had been for some time, as though he was impressed by the steward's death. Ay, you may smile to find me taking notice of the behaviour of such a mongrel rascal as this, as though his looking less sullen than usual, or his conducting himself more brightly and politely, was a matter of importance ; but I tell you that such was my distrust of the men, such was the bitter anxiety bred in me by the situation into which we had been plunged, that I would accept a respectfuller manner *even in this beast* of a German under-steward as marking the *difference* between the promise of Miss Agnes and me escaping

from the *Silver Sea* without further mishap or difficulty and the threat of dangers darker and more deadly than our knowledge of the men's capacity of evil-doing would permit us to dream of. When our breakfast was ready, the German went forward, taking with him, as I noticed, several bottles of spirits and wine. Miss Agnes looked from him to me, on which I said, "They will have their way. If they stop at that I shall be satisfied. After all, they command the ship, and the best way to hinder them from acting as if they were licensed is by letting them indulge themselves without appearing to observe their behaviour." But, to speak the truth, I was not sure whether to feel troubled or not by their persistence in sending for drink from the cabin. If the vessel could be worked without them, why, I should have been delighted had they made themselves dead drunk at once and kept so until the anchor was let go. I very well recollected the view I had approved of in Nipper; I mean his idea that the four men—there were but four now since the steward was gone—would be less likely to be dangerous if they continued drinking than if they kept their brains clear to think with. But a new thought on this head came to me with that shining morning. If the men meant mischief—if, in a word, they designed to rid themselves of Miss Agnes and me, and run off with the ship or whatever there was of value in her—was not their purpose one to be perfectly served by drink? Was not the sort of courage they might want, to be found in the bottles they were opening forward? and might not the liquor render them more cruel and reckless than they would be if they kept sober? Pleasant thoughts these to bewilder the mind of a poor devil who was at sea for no earthly reason he could think of unless it was to oblige a gouty old gentleman, who, for all he knew, was now probably asleep at the bottom of the ocean! I glanced at my companion, as she stood gazing aloft at the sails, with the delicate fringe of her eyelashes marked fair against the blue over the rail, and said to myself that such thoughts as these would not do; if I encouraged them they would simply end in breaking down my nerves and unfitting me to encounter any realities—of a quite different nature, mayhap, from those I was imagining—that might befall. So with a kind of inward toss, as if the mind in me seized the fancies, I hove these distracting thoughts clean out of my head, with a curse upon them and a solemn resolution to stick to my business of carrying the ship to Pernambuco by dead reckoning, and leaving the rest to God.

Shortly after the German had entered the galley, Nipper came out of the fore-castle and made his way to the wheel. He touched his cap to Miss Inglefield and asked me if the cabin breakfast was ready. I said yes. He then took the wheel from me. "This weather'll do, sir," said he, with a cheerful roll of his eyes round till they settled upon my companion with a pleasant smile.

"Ay," said I, "a few days of this is all that we've got to pray for at present, Nipper."

"If the others was in as great a hurry as I am," he exclaimed, "they'd set stunsails. Seems ridiculous to be voyaging along under a sky like that there with fore and mizzen royals furled. However, Mr. Aubyn, and you, Miss, I dare say neither of you much cares how easy our gallant sailors takes it providing they're willin' to stand by for the call o' duty. If they're ready to pull the right ropes and keep the yards trimmed for the course you've laid down for the ship, why, we mustn't grumble," he continued, giving me a peculiar look, "if we find 'em too lazy to rouse the stunsails' booms out to the tune of 'Cheerly, men !' or go aloft with the slush pot for the mere idee of keepin' their hands in training."

I quite understood the look he had given me ; but it was not a pleasant thing to come on top of the thoughts which had previously possessed me. Was I to suppose that there *was* a chance of the fellows refusing to trim sail for Pernambuco? which, of course, would mean that they meant to do something else with the ship than hand her over to the Brazilian port officials. However, my resolution not to bother my mind over possibilities was still strong in me ; and then, again, there was some comfort to be drawn from the circumstance of Nipper's honesty. He was trustworthy, and not a man to run his neck into a noose, I was sure ; and I recall the thought stealing into me, that if, after all, it should come to the worst—if I should really have reason to believe that the Finn and the other three men had determined upon a course that threatened Miss Inglefield's safety and mine—I might be able to count upon Nipper's help to make a fight for it ; for though, to be sure, we should be two to four, yet two of them were foreigners, one of them, the German, a mere whippersnapper of a "Dutchman," as sailors call those fellows, and the other, big and powerful, indeed, but an arrant cur at bottom ; whilst as for the other two, why it was impossible for me to think of the cook's figure without considering him one of those soft-skinned, soap-coloured men, such as you will often find in ships' galleys, who are to be knocked out of all calculation by a single well-directed blow.

Well, this was the state of affairs aboard the *Silver Sea* on the morning following the gale ; and then for three days—as I shall briefly relate, that I may make room for what is to follow—only a very few things happened which deserve to be written down. Beautiful tropical weather seemed to settle upon us in earnest. I can never forget the indescribable richness of the blue sky ; the delicate silver beauty of the shreds of clouds which came and went, as dew-drops come and go, upon the azure floor ; the unstained, far-reaching sapphire margin of the ocean softly breathing a long light swell from the south, with its glorious variation of sunrise, meridian, and sunset effects when the white and dazzling sparkling of the morning deepened off the rolling brows into the burning golden ardency of noon, and into the scarlet fires and blood-red illuminations of the equatorial sunset.

The men loosed the fore and mizzen royals and the flying jib, so that the ship looked up for the Brazilian coast under all plain sail; but they would not take the trouble to run the booms out and set the studding sails, though so impatient was I to get all the speed that was possible out of the light four or five knot breeze that blew hot as a tiger's breath off the glaring waters, that I felt I could have put two men's strength into my hands to help them in that work, had they been willing to start upon it.

Spite of my efforts, however, I could not clear a troublesome feeling of uneasiness out of my mind. The notion had taken possession of me that Grondhal had a scheme to make himself master of the ship and what was in her, and I'd catch myself watching him when he was on deck almost, positively, as though I was afraid he would shoot me if I did not keep my eye upon him. The conviction that he had made away with Pipes grew stronger and stronger in me, and there was no sort of wickedness I did not consider him capable of, though, God knows, I could not have accounted for these fancies, unless I pointed to my nerves, which, to be sure, were beginning to flag under the pressure put upon them by the several heavy and heart-straining things which had happened. It was on this same day—I mean on that which followed the storm—that in the afternoon I was sitting with Miss Inglefield under the short awning, the ordinary seamen being at the wheel, the breeze steady and the ship sailing quietly along, when I noticed Grondhal quit the side of the cook and the German, with whom he had been talking for nearly half an hour, whilst they all smoked and lounged in a narrow shadow cast by some sail on the deck; and after looking my way for a moment or two in a hesitating manner, more as if he was thinking of what he should say than lingering for want of courage, he came with deliberate steps aft. Nipper lay sleeping on the forecastle, and I heartily wished him awake and near me when I saw the Finn coming. Miss Agnes whispered hurriedly, "He has something to say to you, I am sure."

"Nothing that ought to alarm us, let him say what he will," I answered; and then he came to a stand in front of me.

"I shoopose, Mishter Aubyn," said he, "dot your navikashion orf dis ship is all right. She is going true for Pernambuco?"

"You know the method I am adopting," I answered, staring up into his queer face that lay scarlet with sunburn and heat in the frame of his great head, so to put it, for it wants a paint-brush to describe the fellow's appearance properly.

"Yash," he replied, "ted reckoning it is called. But vill dis course pe true?"

"As true as I can make it," I said, "by putting the ruler on the chart and drawing a straight line from Captain Pipes's last observation to the Brazilian port."

He scratched the back of his head, pausing over something he

meant to say, as if in search of English words. Miss Inglefield lay back in her chair with her eyes fixed on the deck.

"I am hoping every hour to meet with a ship," I continued, "that will help us to the extent of one or two men, and that will tell me if I am out in my navigation. Or perhaps, for the sake of the salvage, you know, a vessel might be willing to accompany us to Pernambuco, and put an end to my rough calculations by the loan of a mate who can use the sextant;" and here I stood up almost mechanically and ran my eyes around the sea.

"Would you mindt my looking at der chart?" said Grondhal. "My mates," he added, pointing forwards with his thumb over his shoulder, "dornt shoopose you are wrong, boot dey hov said, 'Grondhal, you look also; two heads ish better nor von.'"

My suspicion of this man was so keen that I gazed at him for some moments before replying, striving in that brief time by all the swiftness of my imagination to conjecture what sinister motive, if any, lay in this wish of his. I then said, "Oh, certainly; there is no earthly reason why you should not study the chart. If you can correct any error I have fallen into, so much the better. Come below with me."

Miss Agnes started and said quickly, "Why not bring the chart on deck, Mr. Aubyn? I will fetch it."

I laughed and exclaimed, "Oh no; the chart is stretched ready on the table; it would be a pity to disturb it," regretting that she should have spoken, for the very last thing I wanted the Finn to suppose was that I was afraid of him, and *this* her speech, more by her manner than the words, implied.

I walked to the companion, and Grondhal followed me down into the cabin. I took care when at the bottom of the ladder so as to walk that he shouldn't be behind me, and with my eyes screwed up at him, though I pretended to take no notice, I observed him squinting to right and left at the berths as we passed along, whilst he dangled his cap at his side, being too much oppressed, I suppose, by the novelty of the interior not to stand on a trifle of ceremony when in it. I walked into the captain's berth, and pointed to the chart lying stretched upon the table. "Here is the South Atlantic," said I; "and here," I continued, indicating a piece of paper, "are the calculations I have made to-day from the speed which we have found the ship to be going at by the log. What, now, is the information you require?"

He put his cap down—having, as I had perceived, first taken a quick rolling look round at the cabin, like a man would who sums up what is in it—spread his great hands out, like a couple of immense bunches of carrots, on the chart, and bent his nose down to it. "Dis here," said he, "ish der Brazil coast?"

"Yes."

He ran his eye along, and then said, "Ah, here ish Pernambuco." He stood looking at the chart for at least a minute—and really a

minute makes a long time on occasions of this kind—without speaking, and I watched his eyes travelling here and there, as low down in fact as the chart went. What was in the fellow's mind, I wondered. What object had he in asking to see this chart? It was desperately hard. I thought, that such an act of mercy as we had shown in saving his life and caring for him afterwards, should come to serve us as if the deed done was vile instead of noble. But for this Finn, I don't suppose I should have had an anxiety outside the bare conducting of the ship to port, for with Nipper as a true man, the others were to have been kept under.

"Is dot mark an island?" said he at last, pointing to the Roccas, and I recollect the forefinger he used had its top joint curved into a hook, as though there wasn't a point about this bulky scoundrel that hadn't been fashioned as unpleasantly as nature or disease could contrive it.

"Yes," said I, throwing a light glance at the chart, for I believed those rocks to be an island then.

"Und dot's an island, too?" he exclaimed, pointing to Fernando Noronha.

"Plain enough. When water is all round a spot on a chart it's an island," said I, struggling to imagine all the time what idea these questions of his were meant to work out.

"Vill they pe oninhabited islands now, Mishter Aubyn?" said he, turning to look at me. Then he added quickly, "I tell you vy I ashk; dey are pretty near in our roadt; shoopose we should go ashore on von orf dem, if dey pe barren, it would be dom hard upon us."

"True," said I; "but unless a gale of wind drives us that way, I don't see what we have to fear from those islands."

"Und dose pe all der islands, eh?" he exclaimed, with his eyes closely searching the chart. "Well, as you shay, der danger is shmall, und I can tell my mates der roadt is clear. Boot der coorse to Pernambuco—ish dot all right?"

"Judge for yourself," I replied, placing the parallel rulers on the chart.

"Yash, yash," said he. "It ish all right, Mishter Aubyn." And then after toying with the rulers for a few moments, setting them down first southwards and then northwards, as if he were thinking of something else all the while, though I could have sworn that what he did was not wholly mechanical either, he left the table, and throwing a glance around, said, "Dis ish a proper kindt orf capin der shleep in. 'Tish a plaguey fine thing to be shkipper."

I was not to be led into talking with him, and said as I went to the door, "Is there anything more in the way of information that you want from me?"

"No, sir," he answered.

On this I posted myself in a manner to let him understand I waited for him to pass; he took the hint, and walked into the cabin and then on deck; but I had not the least doubt that had I gone

first, he would have lingered behind and overhauled the berths. Indeed, I was disposed to believe that this had been the motive of his asking me to let him see the chart, and that he had lacked impudence enough to prevent my cool and collected waiting for him to go on deck from thwarting him. Yet I fancied that there must have been something more than that, too, in his request ; but think as I would I could not put together any suspicion that satisfied me. It was four o'clock when I stepped out of the companion. I resumed my chair by the side of Miss Agnes, who I had noticed looking aft anxiously awaiting my return, for *this* much I could tell by the smile she greeted me with when she saw me.

"Oh, what made you go into the cabin with that horrid dangerous Finn?" she exclaimed. "He might have wanted to get you there to murder you."

"Well, I went prepared for anything that might happen in that way," I answered, laughing, "for I fear our friend is not a person of excellent principles. But I don't think his game is bloodshed. What it *is* I don't know, and that is one reason why we ought not in fairness to consider that he entertains any evil schemes. His reason for going below is quite harmless, so far as I can make out."

"What did he want?" she inquired.

I repeated what had passed between the man and me, thinking perhaps that her woman's wit would hit upon something my clumsier faculties might miss. I watched her pretty face, grave with pondering for a little, but she could make no more of the fellow's object than I. "It's quite likely," said she, "that the men may have asked him to find out if you are steering the ship correctly ; and indeed I hope it may be so, for it will be a sign that they are as anxious to end this dreadful voyage as we are, without meeting with any more troubles."

"There is Nipper at the wheel," said I. "Let us go and get his opinion on the matter ;" and I moved the chairs aft on to the port quarter, within easy talking distance of the wheel, in such a manner as to make the Finn, and Eye, and the German, who were together on the fore-castle, suppose that I did so to catch the draught blowing down out of the spanker. "Nipper," said I, looking at him, and then speaking with my face turned towards Miss Agnes, "before you relieved the wheel the Finn came aft and asked me to show him the chart, that he might ascertain if I was steering the true course for Pernambuco. He told me the others—not including *you*, I suppose—wanted to be sure I was right." And I then went on to relate what had happened.

Nipper chewed his tobacco in a silence so prolonged that two of three times Miss Agnes glanced at him, quite supposing that the man did not mean to answer me. But I knew better, and relished the thorough attention he was giving to the subject.

"I can't see what views he can have," he exclaimed at last. "It may be as he says. The German's a cur, an' I know the cook's
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sick of the ship and wants to be out of it. Nothen's been said to me about any doubt as to your correct navigation of the vessel. That's not surprisin', for they've got already to keep me at arm's length, as if they knew—or anyways, as if the Finn knew—that his inclinations was not likely to be mine. Are the hislands he pointed to on the chart pretty well in our road?"

"Not as we head."

"Would they look to be on the chart?"

"Why, yes; for a good many leagues go to an inch, you know, on a map."

"Well, I don't know what to think, I'm sure, Mr. Aubyn," said he, thoughtfully. "There's nothing sartinly to make a man suspicious in sailors askin' a landsman like you—beggin' your pardon ---if you're sure you'resteerin' of them truly. There's no one aboard that knows anything of navigation, you see. I shouldn't allow my mind to think much of this, if I was you, sir. You're properly doubtful of the Finn, and he ought to be watched, that's my opinion. But it won't do to be *too* down upon him. He may mean in this here matter no more than what appears."

I was not so sure; but it was pretty clear that if the man was plotting any mischief, the nature of it was not to be conjectured at this stage, and so I let Nipper's view of the matter satisfy me for the present.

The weather remained wonderfully fine and the breeze a steady five to six knot wind that sent us slipping smoothly through the water, with our yards braced well in and every cloth doing its work, I was able to keep my calculations going properly, for I found that the men were as regular in heaving the log as they were in taking their meals—a circumstance that eased my mind a good deal, for I very naturally put it down to their anxiety that I should steer the ship rightly, and carry her to Pernambuco in safety. They helped themselves to the cabin drink, but though Eye and the cook were often thick with liquor, they were never incapable nor brutal with it; whilst as to the Finn and the under-steward, though it was plain they took care to keep their skins full, I never again saw them downright intoxicated. Nipper told me he drank as much as he wanted, which was just a little, and no more; and this he did because he said the wine and beer put a bit of spirit in him, and qualified the bad effects of the junk and salt pork he had been eating since we left England, and not for the sake of seeming one with the others; "for," said he, "there's no use in pretending I'm anything more than a shipmate of theirs when they can see with their own eyes that I'm nothen else."

In this manner we sailed along, the men almost entirely living on deck and looking after the ship without ever obliging me to call upon them. We sighted but one vessel, a three-masted schooner *with the line of her rail just flush with the horizon, some miles too distant to render signalling practicable, though I should willingly*

have taken a deal of trouble to determine our exact position even to the extent of chasing her, so very doubtful was I of the accuracy of my calculations. I thought it strange then that we did not encounter any vessels, but the truth is we were a trifle too far to the eastward for sailing ships outward bound round the Cape, and to the westward for sailing ships homeward bound. Steamers were hardly to be looked for just in those waters. Then again, at sea the horizon offers but a narrow stretch, and ships might be passing each other twenty miles apart without ever dreaming that they were not the only objects to be found on the bosom of the deep for hundreds of miles. However, two days after the night of the gale, during which time the marks I had laid down on the chart showed that we had made excellent progress, something befell that filled me with thoughtfulness and anxiety. In consideration, I suppose, of my navigating the ship, and possibly of my being a landsman and a passenger from whom sailor's work was not to be expected, the men had so arranged the matter of steering that I was exempted from taking the wheel; I therefore came and went as I chose, and I might have passed the time without further reference to the ship than was implied in my calculations respecting her course, had I not considered it necessary to be always on the alert so as to catch the very first signs which might show themselves of foul intentions on the part of Grondhal or his comrades. It happened that on the evening of the second day I had been sitting with Miss Inglefield till it had fallen dark—but a brilliant dusk it was, for the sky was cloudless and the stars lay in a sheet of sparkles, which the water, trembling with the breeze, gave back in the white of the heavenly reflections, and the green and yellow fires of its own phosphorescence. My conversation with Miss Agnes was of so interesting a character that I had paid no attention to the ship, nor to the movements of the men, though the wheel had been relieved twice whilst we had been sitting. I know not how the subject had been come at, but I recollect that the girl had been telling me about her life at home, of some relatives who had charge of her when her parents were in India, and so forth, and I listened with attention because what she said of her mother, though God knows it was all uttered with perfect tenderness and a charming childlike unconsciousness of the effect produced, amply confirmed my old theories of Mrs. Colonel Inglefield, whom I had never liked, whom I had regarded as a pert, shallow, extremely conceited woman, and with whom nothing could be more certain than that her daughter had lived a tedious life of suppression. I rose at last to bring her a cup of tea from below, for I did a good deal of the waiting now, and the cabin, in spite of windsails and open skylights, was too hot to be usable except for sleeping in. I noticed the large form of Grondhal at the wheel as I stepped aft, and I walked up to the *binnacle* and looked into it, though what impelled me to do it I *don't know*, for it was no habit of mine, since I trusted the men,

who knew the course perfectly well. The ship was heading west-north-west, and was therefore points off the true direction I had made out for her to take. I stood looking with astonishment, and then casting my eyes aloft I perceived by the starlight that the weather leeches of the upper canvas were shaking, and that indeed the vessel was sailing as close to the wind as the trim of the yards would permit.

"Why, Grondhal," I cried out, "where the devil are you carrying the ship to, man? D'ye see how she heads?"

He started, and, lifting up one of his paws off a spoke, rubbed his eyes violently, bent with a yawn to squint at the card, and then exclaimed in a voice of surprise, "By Gott, now! vot a ding to hoppen. I moost hov fell ashleep standing oopright. Vell to pe shure!" and with a great air of hurry and confusion he put the wheel over and let the ship fall off to her course. If the man hadn't been a bad actor, if he had even gone to work a little less demonstratively, I should really have supposed that he had been nodding at the wheel; but his clumsy air of sleepiness and surprise satisfied me that he had been all through as wide awake as I, and being fearfully suspicious of the fellow, I instantly went to work to find something sinister in this heading of the ship to the northwards. Maybe it was my ignorance of the sea—my ignorance, I mean, of the inner and deep and hidden life of the calling—that kept me blundering and wondering over matters which a sailor would have solved in a very little while. Yet I cannot help recalling that Nipper, who was a good seaman and an old hand, and quite honest, as I afterwards came to know, was as much at fault as I, though he was thrown with the men, and was therefore likely by his constant intercourse to overhear remarks and witness signs which would not be seen or heard by me. Indeed, he had not the least idea whether there was any plot under weigh or not. I wanted to speak to him about the Finn keeping the ship off her course that I might get his opinion upon it, and hung about the deck till he came aft to the wheel, as it would never have done to send for him or call him and be seen privately talking with him. The night was then advanced, and a wonderful silence lay upon the ship, every sail being rounded into the stillness of marble by the breeze; and nothing broke the stillness that hung like the spangled shadow itself upon the breathing and wrinkled deep, but now and again a faint crunching sound from under the bows, such as a man might make by thrusting his arms into an autumn bush stiff with dying or dead leaves, caused by the keen eating of the shearing cutwater into the liquid ebony that rolled in light folds under the ship's forefoot.

"Nipper," said I, speaking softly, after taking a narrow look into the gloom along the deck to make sure that no one was near, "do you ever recollect, when taking the wheel, to have found the ship off her course?"

"Since when, sir?"

"Since sail was made after the gale."

"Never."

"This evening I stepped up to the binnacle to look at the card. I found the ship heading west-north-west. The Finn was at the wheel, and pretended to be dozing, but he was not. Can you imagine any object the man would have in steering a wrong course, more especially after professing to be so mighty anxious to make sure that I was navigating the vessel correctly?"

"To what part of the world would his steering have brought us could he have held on till we reached there?" asked Nipper.

"To the coast north of Cape San Roque," I answered.

"Well, sir, if he meant anything by putting his helm down, all I can say is I don't see what it could be. If he wants to run away with the ship, he'd not go muckin' about in small fashions like this here. What's an hour or two of steerin' four points off goin' to do for him? Besides, he's got no chart, nothen to tell him where he'll come to by headin' in such and such a course."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Well, I'm so far sure that I never see such a thing in the fore-castle. There may be books there sartinly. One or two, perhaps, may bear upon the navigation of these parts—I can't say, for I'm no scholar and never looked into 'em. But supposin' he *has* a chart, and supposin' he *has* books larning him all he'd like to know respecting this ocean, what's his luffing the ship for a hour or two going to signify?"

"But suppose the others steer a course indicated by him when they're at the wheel?"

"Why, if we could be sure of that, it 'ud prove there was something hatching. And yet," he exclaimed, "even supposin' *that*, they're all so bignorant, how do they know where they're a goin' to?"

"It may be as you say," said I. "I thoroughly distrust that blackguard Finn, and in everything he does I look to find something wrong—something threatening. Still, he may have dozed at the wheel and unconsciously luffed the ship. We may as well give him the benefit of the doubt this time, anyway."

"If mischief's meant, the time's slipping by, which I don't understand," said Nipper, thoughtfully. "Every day's closin' the Brazil coast, and any hour may heave a ship in sight for you to signal and get help from. This ought to make me reckon that no harm's meant, when all's said and done. I don't *know*, mind. They might rise this verry night an' try an' chuck us two and the lady overboard; and if *that's* their politics, why, I hope I may be awake when they begin," said he, with a sort of swelling up of his figure as I could make out against the stars; "but so far as my eyes allow me to look. I see no signs of any capers of that kind, an' I wouldn't mind betting any man a farden's worth of silver spoons that whatever their wishes may be, an' I don't doubt they'd like *to have the walue of this ship an' all what's in her in their pockets*"

—and who wouldn't?—they've settled nothen among 'em, and are all of 'em too great curs, from the bloomin' Finn down to the bloomin' German, with the cook and Eye between, to do anything that might bring on a melhee betwixt us and them and arterwards put their necks in danger of John Ketch." So saying he spat violently after the fashion of sailors who, having said their say, want their hearers to know that every word's meant.

It was a very cheerful view to take of the matter, and not a little comforting to me, for there was not only a deal of sound sense in the man's arguments, but he was also a sailor, a man who knew what sailors were, who had a shipmate's and messmate's acquaintance with the characters of the fellows we talked about. When I went below and lay in my bunk turning his words over, I felt the justice of much of what he had said, and more particularly was I willing to conclude with him that if Grondhal and his mates intended to act as villains, they were so far without plans, and might prove too cowardly, even when they had formed plans, to carry them out. Nevertheless, this was an abominable time I was passing through, quite enough in it to weaken stronger nerves than mine, and harass the brain with bitter anxieties. I had made up my mind to think of the Finn as poor old Pipes's murderer, and that being so, why, you see, I thought him quite capable of matching that crime in other ways, and I never lay down upon my bed without a long spell of wakefulness, during which I would catch myself listening for any sound on deck, starting at a footfall overhead, and when asleep, breaking from my slumber to listen to God knows what, till the very sound of the creaming water washing past under the open scuttle would become unbearable to me. It was wonderful that the few days I had of this sort of thing did not breed a fever in me. I tell you, it's a fearful lot to have to live in constant expectation of danger. Whether the Finn knew my hate and suspicion of him, I cannot say. The weather made but few demands upon the men, and I saw little of any of them unless at the wheel. They drank and ate as they chose and what they chose, lounging from morning till night, but nearly always in a group like men spinning long yarns. They never attempted to enter the cabin—I do not, of course, speak of the under-steward, who continued to wait upon us, or rather to bring our meals aft and put them down, though his manner grew more and more sullen; nor can I remember that they were ever guilty of any rudeness to myself and Miss Inglefield. It was the fear that they were hatching mischief that kept me restless and miserable. Yet only once again did I find the ship off her course, and this time the cook was at the wheel. The ship's head was higher than Grondhal had luffed her, and this was rendered practicable by the wind having drawn farther aft than it *was blowing* when the Finn steered on the occasion I refer to. I *called the cook's attention to the course, and asked him sharply what he meant by such gross inattention.* He looked at me with

languid bloodshot eyes, and said, in a thick voice, "'Tain't my business to steer. Never larned that art. I'm a cook, that's my callin'. If I forgets the pints of the compass, 'tain't my fault."

"Well, let her go off to west by south, will you, for that's her course? And if you're as impatient as you once professed to be to get out of the ship, you'll please keep her to it," said I, noticing that he smelt strongly of drink, and that he looked on the whole as muddled as a man can well appear who has yet the power of keeping his legs stiff under him.

Thus it was how matters stood, down to the moment of the incident I am now about to relate.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HARD AND FAST.

It was one of the peace fullest, loveliest nights I ever remember on land or sea. The sense of profound repose was inspired more by the light breeze than by the darkness and the stars and the red moon that rose late and shapeless out of the sea till she soared into silver. A deep calm, with water like polished ebony going into the twinkling shadow, would have yielded stillness; but the wonderful peace I found seemed to lie in the delicate warm wind that put everything to sleep on board the ship, as though a prolonged "hush!" were being uttered over her; and the very ripples that came sliding through the mirrored starlight and the dusky side of the vessel was more like the babbling of old ocean smiling in some dream of rest than the familiar stirring of waters under the gentle whipping of the air.

The moon rose late, but she found Miss Inglefield and me still on deck, where we had been since sunset. The small awning was spread and protected the girl from the dew that dropped out of the gloom in showers till you could have scraped whole pools of it off the skylight and hen-coops; but it left the heavens exposed to high above the sea under the ridge-ropes, so that the starlight gushed so fairly down on my companion's face that I could follow the expressions in it as she'd raised her silver-glimmering eyes—and that is the term for the lustre that was in them then—or glance around whilst we talked calmly of her father and mother and our friends and the sailors who had gone with them, and wondered what their fate had been, and whether we should ever meet them again, and whilst we recalled the incidents of the voyage and our troubles and anxieties, and arranged plans for communicating with her friends when we arrived home. There was no love-making. It had not come to that, whatever might have been the thoughts in us. The beauty and peace of the night put a sort of melancholy into our minds, and we talked gravely, which, to be sure, should seem

likely enough, for i' was sad to look back anyway, and that we did for the most part.

The ordinary seaman, Eye, was at the wheel, having come aft at ten o'clock, and I have good reason for remembering who was the last man that steered the *Silver Sea* that night before I went below. Forward there was no sign of any one stirring, though I knew that the others were on deck, lying down in sheltered places. The ship did not lean; there was no weight in the wind, though it blew right a-beam and all plain sail was set, raising three pallid fabrics into the darkness, with their edges whitening out into a sort of faintness that was like dim light to the stars; she was sliding through the water with erect spars, without a curtesy, whilst the bubbles slid by with a noise like the distant tinkling of bells, and hull and decks were steeped in gloom that seemed liquid from the soft, phosphoric, star-tipped darkness upon the sea rising up into it till the shapeless lump of red moon rising, distorted by the pinkish mist that lifted with her, peered over our taffrail or quarter, and cast its faint glow along the ship like a glance from some heavenly eye that glanced above the sea-line to observe us.

I remained on deck for about half an hour after Miss Agnes went to her cabin. I recollect furling the little awning, which there was no need to keep spread, being always willing to put my hand to any job of that kind that the men might see that I was willing to help them. The long quiet chat I had had with Miss Inglefield served to call my mind away from any fancies calculated to disturb me; but now that I was alone, I was sensible of a depression that had hung upon me, lightly indeed, throughout the morning. It was pure nervousness, no doubt; there was nothing else to account for it. Indeed, all through that day the conduct of the men had been as quiet as if they had regulated it to the Sunday, which it happened to be; I could trace no effects of drink in their movements or speech as they walked the decks or lay talking together, though I knew they had enough beer, spirits, and wine stowed away in the forecastle or the galley to last them for a week of hard drunkenness. Neither Nipper nor I had been able to discover if the ship was again headed off her course, though the wind, that had quartered us for some time and had only drawn a-beam that evening, rendered it easy for the men to bring her to when I was paying no attention without causing the shift of helm to be visible in the trembling of the sails; so that putting one thing with another, and remembering that we were constantly approaching the Brazilian coast, that we could not fail to make Pernambuco speedily, and that we were bound, in any case before long, to meet with ocean steamers and other vessels capable of giving us the help of men and navigation we needed, there was nothing to explain the fit of despondency upon me, unless it were nervousness and the lack just then of the strength of the fine health I had heretofore enjoyed.

I looked over the rail into the starlit distances and into the east, whence the moon had soared so high as to change her hot and cloudy red into silver powerful enough to empearl the yard and spars of the ship, but there was no shadow anywhere to indicate a sail. The sight of such an object would have comforted me, I believe, as tending to relieve the profound and awful sense of loneliness excited by the shadowed ocean. It could have served no other end; but I was in one of those nervous moods which might be soothed by the knowledge that there were human beings like ourselves within the compass of the glittering mass of darkness through whose heart we were being urged by a breeze that was like the sighing of spirits. Sometimes I'd catch myself starting at the fancy of some one moving on the forecastle or along the waist; and then I'd wonder what there should be to alarm me in the figure of one of the men rising to take a look round, should he do so; and this wonder would raise a kind of consternation in me, as though I were under the spell of some sure and calamitous presentiment; until feeling certain that I should be acting with extreme incautiousness if I continued to feed my nervousness by looking at the dusky, moon-touched ship and the ocean-darkness swarming with pallid, cloudy fires and the reflection of the luminaries, I turned on my heel, and with a brief "Good night, Eye; keep a bright look-out, for I see no one moving forwards," I went below to obtain some rest for my nerves in two or three hours of sleep. I was aroused by a hand violently grasping and shaking my shoulder.

"For God Almighty's sake, wake up, Mr. Aubyn. *The ship's ashore!*"

It was Nipper; I knew him, half-stupefied as I was by sleep, but he had to shout out again to make me understand him. It was still night-time; the glass of the scuttle was black against the darkness outside, but through the open door of the berth the light of the cabin lamp, which I had forgotten to extinguish, streamed upon us and enabled us to see one another.

"Ashore!" I cried, discrediting my senses. "*Ashore!*" I repeated, too thunderstruck and incredulous to stir for a moment or two, for no concussion had aroused me; I had been sensible of no such jar or shock as thrills through a ship when she strikes; and the motionlessness of her *now*, and the stillness, save for a tramping of feet overhead, was like giving the lie to Nipper's report.

"Mr. Aubyn, the ship's ashore, hard and fast," he cried hoarsely; "where, the Lord alone knows. She greased her keel on to it as though it was mud, and s'elp me God, ne'er a man knew she'd grounded till the cook, who'd followed Eye at the wheel, yells out that the vessel had stopped sailin'!"

By this time I was as broad awake as ever I was in sunlight, out of my bunk, and cramming my feet into my shoes. I ran into the cabin and knocked on the door of Miss Agnes's berth,

but not so noisily as to alarm her. She asked, in a faint frightened voice, who was there. "It's I—Mr. Aubyn. Pray arise and dress yourself completely, but as quickly as possible, and join me on deck. Do not be alarmed. There is no present danger. But I must have you with me as speedily as you can manage to come;" and I then rushed up the companion ladder at Nipper's heels.

I could scarcely believe my eyes. *Ashore!* Why, when one hears *that* word, one thinks of the roar of surf, the wash and rolling thunder of tumbling breakers, of masts cracking as they fall, of the shouts of people horror-stricken by the sudden presence of one of the fiercest and deadliest of maritime perils, of the wild flapping of canvas and the groaning and rending of strong timbers or of iron plates torn by the beating of the hull from their fastenings. But what I hastened from the cabin to arrive in the midst of was a scene as placid as the night-picture I had quitted three or four hours previously. The ship had a heel of about twelve or fifteen degrees, certainly not more; her canvas was full; there was nothing to make one suppose that she had suffered in the smallest degree aloft, and it would have been impossible without glancing over the side to know that she was motionless instead of sailing quietly along, though her inclination was in excess of what the weight of wind suggested. The stars were shining brightly, the moon hung clear over the weather topsail yardarm, and though daylight was not far off, there was no hint of it yet to be found in the dark and scintillating east. The wheel was abandoned. From up over the side came the purring sounds of ripples breaking against the vessel under the bends, with here and there a kind of faint plashing noise, which were evidently produced by the washing of the tide round the exposed heads of the reef, or whatever it might be that we had struck upon. But the strangest of all was a sort of confused shrill crying, weakened by distance, that came along clear athwart the breeze over the bows, as I reckoned. What it was I couldn't imagine. I heard it the instant my head was above the companion, and when I came to a stand for a bewildered moment to gaze around me, and grasp as best I could the new dreadful misfortune that had overtaken us. It was a sound that made the night wild, as the ghastly glimmer of froth does, or the swift shadows of black clouds mixed with moonshine: a species of long-drawn faint screaming, as though a hundred children were crying and wailing for help half a mile or more off, from some half-tide stretch of rock.

On a sudden the Finn, perceiving my figure, came stalking up to me; he was followed by the others, and we formed a group close against the after skylight.

"Mishter Aubyn," said Grondhal, "vere vill dis pe dot ve hov strook upon?"

"I can't tell you," I replied; "but that won't matter for the moment. Have you sounded the well?"

"No use doin' that," said the cook; "the ship couldn't sink furdher if she was full to the hatches."

"Ay, but we ought to know if she is tight, man," I cried; "for we may be able to get her afloat."

One of the men laughed; I couldn't tell to whom the voice belonged: and Eye exclaimed, "No use talking of getting her off. No more grinding work for me. There's a good boat, an' I suppose the Brazil coast ain't fur distant, is it?"

"Nipper," cried I, half wild with consternation, "I am no sailor; I cannot see my way in this lamentable business. Cannot you advise? What ought to be done? Good God, men!" I exclaimed, rounding upon the Finn, "you surely will not let the ship lie here without making a struggle to float her?"

A hand was slipped into mine; it was cold as ice and trembling. I turned and saw Agnes Inglefield at my side.

"What ought to be done's plain enough, Mr. Aubyn," said Nipper, in the tone of a man who feels that he speaks to the purpose; the light sails should be clewed up, and the topsails laid aback. What the canvas is doin' now is just a drivin' of her harder and faster. The wessel ought to be lightened, then a warp should be got up and the stream anchor carried out astern. There's men enough here to man the winch and do what's proper, though it should come to no more than trying."

"Yash, yash, but foorst orf all, vere are ve, Sharley?" exclaimed the Finn, with a grin in his voice. "If ve are near some island, I'm for leafing der bloody hooker to her fate. And if not, den still, ash Sholomon hov saidt, der Brazil coast cannot be far of, und it vould be easier for us to take der boat und hov a pleasant sail to Pernambuco dan pe sthraining our poor old legs and arms, in strivin' to verk dis plasted *Silber Sea* orf der rocks."

"Good enough for Grondhal!" cried Eye, with a noisy, half drunken, most impudent laugh, in which he was heartily joined by the German.

I was no seaman, but I was no fool; and it flashed upon me instantly that whether this horrible disaster had been brought about by the men or not, they meant to take advantage of it to serve some purpose of their own whose nature was not yet to be ascertained, and that unless Nipper and I could manage to float the vessel between us—a hopeless fancy—she would be left to go to pieces where she was. What was to be done? I whispered hurriedly to Miss Agnes, "We have grounded upon a reef. But the weather, as you see, is beautiful and promises to remain so, and we shall have plenty of time to arrange for our preservation. Go and sit aft there, near the wheel. I have much to do, but I will join you the moment I am able to do so."

She immediately did as I desired.

"Men," I exclaimed, "let go the royal and topgallant halliards, will you? and let us haul up the courses and back the yards."

You'll surely help me to that extent. I've done my best for you—for God's sake don't fail me now, if only for the sake of that poor young lady yonder. We must back the topsails——"

"What's the good? the ship's as fast as if she was in dry dock, and no muckin' about with the yards is goin' to help her," said Eye; and I saw him by the moonlight thrust his hands into his pockets and turn away.

Grondhal exclaimed, "Vell, dere can pe no harm. Der preeze may freshen und ve don't vant no mess, poys; so, Sholomon, turn to, my ladt, and oblige Mishter Aubyn."

One perceived the influence of the man in the way the others went to work. Royal and topgallant sails were clewed up, courses hauled up, spanker brailed up, and the yards swung aback with the topsails left standing with a dispatch that made me see that if the men would but make up their minds to it, the *Silver Sea* need not be long lying aground for the want of will and muscle to warp her afloat. But when this job was over, they coolly lighted their pipes and sat down, the Finn exclaiming, "Dot dey most wait for taylight to shee vere dey vos petore dey did anoder shstroke orf any kindt.

I went to the forecandle, followed by Nipper. He was evidently determined that the men should no longer wonder whether he meant to stick to me or throw in his lot with theirs in any schemes they might have formed. We walked into the eyes of the ship, as the forward part of the forecandle-head is called, and peered into the gloom. The moon threw up the body of the sea, and we could pierce the shadow of the night to some distance; but if land were about, there was no loom of it. We stared with might and main, but there was no outline to be caught to right or left, forward or astern; the ocean went away from us on all sides in a sort of dusky swelling, and if it hadn't been for the lifelessness of the vessel, and the rippling noise of shallow water, and the play and flash of bits of foam here and there, some within stone's throw, you would have sworn we were in the middle of the ocean. Yet a little away on our port bow, about three points say, there was a curious appearance upon the sea. It was white, without any kind of shining, and still I should have guessed it to be the reflection of a planet if its nearness hadn't made me see it was much too big to prove such a thing as that. "It looks like coral sand," said Nipper. "There's two of 'em, d'ye see, Mr. Aubyn?"

"Sand-islands, no doubt," I exclaimed. "But where, in God's name, are we, Nipper? and what on earth can that strange crying noise be?" struck again by the shrill, plaintive, multitudinous crying that had before and at once caught my ear, and that gave to our situation, and to the sea, and to the night, and to the very heavens a character of melancholy wildness that was shocking to me in my depressed and low condition.

"It puzzled me at first," replied Nipper, "but I know what it is now; it's sea-birds. They're a-roostin' on them sandbanks, and

that shindy'll be the talk they're making over the sight of our wessel." Then, giving another long look round, he exclaimed, "What the blazes part of the world are we in? Did any man ever hear of shoals in the South Atlantic before? Is this here a raffle of rocks hove up by an airthquake, or what?"

"Will you take the hand-lead and sound round the ship," said I, "and see how we're situated, whilst I go below and endeavour to ascertain what shoal this may be? I have my suspicions, but I want to be sure."

"Certainly," he answered, and at once walked aft, without speaking to or being addressed by the men who lay or sat smoking upon the main hatch. I called to Miss Inglefield, and she and I went to Pipes's cabin, where the chart which I had used was. The girl had heard and seen enough to know exactly how matters stood, and when I had her in the light I could see sufficient resolution in her pretty pensive face to assure me that she had schooled her fears, and that she had meant to give me no trouble to hearten her up. She said, as I bent over the chart, "This is a cruel misfortune to happen when all was going on so well."

"Ay," said I, bitterly, "and it is made crueller by the rascally behaviour of the men."

"Is the Finn responsible for this?" she inquired.

The question flashed a thought into me that had not before occurred. Was this stranding of the ship the issue meant by the inaccurate and northerly steering I had noted on two occasions, and which, in all human probability, had been repeated again and again unobserved by Nipper or me? If so, how did the Finn know of this shoal? and, knowing it, how had he and his associates managed to steer true for it? and what was their object in aiming for it and wrecking the vessel? I peered at the chart: there was only one spot there that corresponded with the reef we were on, and that was The Roccas. The longitude of the shoal and sand islands was $33^{\circ} 46'$ west, the latitude, $3^{\circ} 51'$ south; their distance from Cape San Roque was 129 miles, $NE. \frac{1}{3} N.$, from Pernambuco about 250 miles as the crow flies, and 84 miles west from the island of Fernando Nironha, the nearest point. All these details I rapidly mastered by hurried computation, Miss Inglefield the while standing by me, breathing quickly and keeping silent. I was sure *now*; I knew where we were; the ship was ashore upon the Roccas, a dreadful and formidable shoal off the Brazilian coast, formed of two sand-islands raised a few feet above high water, the northerly one about eight hundred fathoms long, and the southerly one about five hundred fathoms long, as frightful, desolate, hopeless a shoal as any upon which a ship could go ashore, the more especially since it formed a neighbourhood whose dangers occasioned the captains to give it a wide berth, so that, supposing *persons to be wrecked on it, and left without the means of escaping*

in the shape of boats or materials for the construction of rafts, their doom would be inevitable.

How came we here? The course I had laid down would have carried us miles to the southward of the place. The Finn had inspected the chart; he had noted these islands and the mainland beyond; had not his and the others' secret northerly luffing been contrived that the ship might strike this shoal, or, if she missed it, that she might go ashore somewhere upon the Brazilian coast, well away from the ports there? It was a conspiracy to make one tremble, more for the later dangers it threatened than for the present peril it had plunged us into. I looked at Miss Inglefield. She was watching me intently. When our eyes met she repeated her question: "Is not the Finn responsible for this?"

"Yes," I answered, feeling the paleness and the despair that were in my face, as though I saw myself in a glass. "He and his mates are responsible. They must have repeatedly and secretly steered the ship to the northward of the track I had told them to pursue, and this, and some inaccuracy in my own calculations perhaps, and a current flowing to the north, will account for our present situation."

"But what can be their motive in wrecking us?" she cried, with startled eyes, and bringing her hands together in a sudden convulsive clasp; "surely they value their lives, and if they will not enable you to get the ship off these rocks, what do they intend to do? how do they propose that we should save ourselves?"

"There is the boat," I replied, in a mechanical way, for I was as bewildered as she. I could see no object to be gained by this wrecking of the ship, this subtle, devilish steering her so that she should be cast away. If plunder was their game, why did not they long ago fill their pockets with what they could find in the cabins, and go away in the boat, and leave the ship afloat with us in her if they pleased? Why sneak her on to the Rocas, hitting *that* shoal by chance on their road to the coast they knew they would reach in time, unless, indeed, the destruction of myself and Miss Agnes and Nipper was contemplated, and to be managed without their lifting their hands against us? She was going to say something about the boat, referring to my last answer; but I seized her hand, and said, "Come on deck; I feel like a poisoned rat in this reeking cabin, with those miscreants on deck breathing the pure air and whispering together." Then a thought occurring to me, I asked her to pause whilst I searched the captain's cabin for firearms; for I knew if none were there, there was none elsewhere; but though I hunted high and low, opening and exploring lockers and drawers, I could find no weapon of any description. It was only too plain that there had been but one pistol in the ship, and that it was in poor Pipes's pocket when he went overboard.

When we gained the deck the dawn was breaking. The light was sifting through the indigo, quenching the stars fast, and

showing like a white flame seen through oiled paper. The tropical morning grew so rapidly that in a moment rather than in minutes the decks were showing, and the fabric on high with it; canvas fluttering stole out into tints; the darkness went off the sea like a carpet rolled from it, and first it was a pale grey, and then a dim blue, till the blazing arch of the sun stood up and turned it and the sky into brilliant sapphire. Hand in hand Miss Agnes and I stood by the companion, waiting for the light. When it had come, I led her aft past the wheel, that I might have her as clear of the men as the ship's deck would suffer; and there I left her, begging her not to come forward, to keep her heart up, and to hope and believe that all would be well with us yet. Nipper had finished sounding aft, and was now at work with the lead over the bows. The men, when the light came, got up from the hatch, and went in a body forward to view the little sand-islands. *They* were plain enough now; close, too, they seemed, about a quarter of a mile off, or thereabouts—I cannot be sure. Clouds of sea-fowl were rising off them, many hovering, many again wheeling about our mastheads, and scores breaking away from the main body and flying north and east, south and west, filling the quiet radiant breeze with that shrill, singular, multitudinous crying that had so uncomfortably affected me during the darkness. The islands lay north and south; they were of a dazzling whiteness, and when the sunshine struck them they seemed to seethe in their blue setting like as though they were floating stretches of boiling quicksilver. They showed but a small height above water, about ten or twelve feet as I calculated. Otherwise there was nothing to see but a rock in the westward, jutting up to about twelve feet, with the agitation of water streaming in a current over submerged rugged ground, and here and there a play of froth. All around was the blue sea, showing the immenser, the more overwhelming in its mighty distances for these specks of silver, dazzling sandbanks fixed in its great heart.

CHAPTER XLV.

WE ABANDON THE SHIP.

I STOOD a little while looking at the men forward, wondering, now that they saw what sort of "islands" were these we had struck upon, whether the sight would not dismay them, and determine them to try to heave the ship off whilst the fineness and calmness of the weather made such a job seem practicable. The Finn, standing a head taller than the others, and shading his eyes with his great hand, gazed steadfastly round the sea, as though he could not persuade himself that those two sandbanks *ahead of the ship* and the rock beyond, were all the land that was

in sight. The cook and the German talked volubly and pointed frequently, but I was too far aft to catch more than the murmur of their voices; on the other hand, Eye, leaning against the windlass end, with his hands in his pockets and his cap on the back of his head, puffed at the sooty, inverted pipe in his mouth with an air of mulish indifference that nothing could account for but drink. Then Nipper, hauling up the lead for the last time, threw it down and came to me. He told me that the ship was afloat aft, and hung forwards from about amidships. "Whether it's sand she's on or what I don't know," said he, "but I'll swear she's not hurt herself. Nothen could have been softer than the way she slid into it. If the bottom here was made of grease, this strandin' business couldn't have been more quietly done."

"Will those scoundrels help us to get her off?" I exclaimed.

"I fear not," he replied, shaking his head, with a sidelong look towards them. "It's to be managed, I'm sure; but whatever their schemes is, the floatin' of this wessel wouldn't be part of 'em. I've gathered *that* much, if I'm not able to understand more."

They all came aft before I could exchange further words with Nipper.

"Vell, Mishter Aubyn, hov you foundt out vot landt dis is?" exclaimed Grondhal.

"It's the Roccas reef," I replied.

"Niver heerd of such a place," said the cook. "How fur off is it from Pernambuco?" I told him.

"Vell," said the Finn, "I shoopose de only ting to be done is to get ter poat over. Dese are our plans," he continued, with a surly, almost savage, look at me, as if he would have me understand that I had better not oppose him, and speaking with such a tone of command that Nipper's and my glance met at the first words of it; "de vedder ish fine now, but it may coom on ter plow, and den ter ship vill go to pieces; so ve don't mean ter wait. Ve shall put vater und provisions inter der poat, und land dem und ourselves on dot islandt dere," indicating the more northerly of the two sandbanks. "Ve mosh not pe in a horry. Dere are many dings in der ship ve might vish to take, und ve shall vant a poat to go to and vro between de vessel und der island; boot in case der vedder changes ve shall landt some vater und provisions ferst. Dot is ash it is agreedt, eh, poys?"

"That's it," the three others exclaimed.

"Is it possible that you mean to land, and so abandon the vessel without making an effort to get her off?" I cried.

"We've told you that," exclaimed Eye, with a half-drunken curse. "Surely you can't be so much a landsman as not to know *that when* a ship goes ashore it's her intention to stop there."

There was something behind all this, and I saw in their faces *that it would be mere waste of time to reason with them.* "Have *your way*," said I, and I turned to the rail and looked out to sea,

struggling with a fit of mad temper, lest by some ungovernable outburst I should end in converting the *Silver Sea* into the theatre of a bloody tragedy.

"Coom along, Sharley," bawled the Finn to Nipper; "led's get der poat over. Ve shall vant your help vilst der cook gets der breakfast retty." I lingered a few moments to cool down; but I was still half wild at heart when I went aft to Miss Agnes, and began to talk to her in a voice I purposely softened. "The men persist in refusing to try to get the ship off," said I. "I don't say it *is* to be done, but if they were not scoundrels they would make the attempt."

"What do they mean to do?" she asked.

"Why, to land some water and provisions on one of those islands, and then leisurely abandon the vessel. Were I satisfied," I continued, wishing to check her rising alarm, "that the ship could not be moved, I should consider their plans seamanlike; for if the ship is actually immovable, we *must* take to the boat, and it is a wise precaution to provide against a sudden gale that might break up and scatter the ship as she lies here by landing plenty of food and water at once."

"Is there no way of saving ourselves except by that boat?" she said, looking at it whilst the men freed it of its gripes and fumbled at the tackles.

"No way, since the men will not put their hands to the ship. It will be a boat voyage, but not a long one."

"Oh, but to think, Mr. Aubyn, of being boxed up in that boat, even for a day, with those horrid, dreadful men!" she cried, with a violent shudder, whilst her eyes brightened with fear, as though she was only beginning to realize our position. I remained silent, watching Nipper, who quietly stood by the falls, with his eyes fixed on the Finn, who was giving some directions to the under-steward.

"Why do they refuse to get the ship off?" asked Miss Agnes, after a short pause. "Would they not rather sail home in her than in that boat?"—"They have a motive; I know it in part, but I cannot see right through it," I answered.

"What motive, Mr. Aubyn?" locking her hands and biting her lip to keep the tears back.

"Plunder!" I exclaimed passionately; then, suppressing my voice, I continued: "Nipper long ago suggested, and I am now quite sure, that their intention is to rob the passengers' cabins of all the small valuables and money they can come across. Both stewards talked plentifully of the things belonging to Mr. Edwards and your parents and Mr. Hornby, and the men mean to take all that they can conceal in their shirts and pockets and caps. There is jewellery enough to repay them, I know, and there will be no lack of money, I dare say, for both Hornby and Edwards would come well provided in that way. Oh that they were with us! that all the crew were with us!"

"But they might have all that is in the cabins if they would get

the ship off and help you to sail her to Pernambuco," she exclaimed, with a gleam in her face, as if what she said was a fancy I would act upon and represent to them.

"No," said I, "they know the law too well. They could not claim the things nor retain them."—"But are they not to be bribed?"

I could not reason with her. It was bitterly painful, I tell you, to look into her wistful, streaming eyes, with the sense of her lonely, perilous, dreadful position strong in me, and point out how hopeless her suggestions were. I knew the men—had read their resolution in their countenances and behaviour, and I perfectly understood that no mere promising to reward them if they got the ship off would for an instant divert them from that scheme of plunder which had helped to bring us to our present fearful pass, but which they would render impracticable by warping the vessel afloat, if the thing could be done. What plan they had to escape with their booty I did not know. Whether we were picked up by a ship, or whether we sailed the boat straight to Pernambuco, it was certain they ran the risk of being searched, or of the plunder being found upon them, even supposing that I did not inform against them. Had they considered this? Possibly not. Sailors are still sailors even when they are miscreants; and one characteristic of Jack is an incapacity to see much more than half of a thing at a time, specially if he be of the grossly and coarsely ignorant type to which the Finn and his fellows belonged. When the boat was in the water, the men unshipped the gangway and threw a set of steps over the side, and they then went to work to hand provisions into her. These were brought up from the cabin by the German, and consisted of biscuit, tinned meats, a few hams and cheeses, and a quantity of flour. I took notice that they passed no bottles of beer or wine or spirits into the boat; but I supposed that they would remember what they had forgotten in this way when they came to the ship again from the island. I watched them pumping fresh water into some breakers, and when these were stowed in the boat I expected to see them go in a body into the cabin and rifle the various berths; instead of which they went forward, and after a little I perceived them sitting in a group on the forecastle eating their breakfast. Nipper kept with them, but the indescribable something in his quiet manner, or else the way in which the others seemed to keep him off, more by their hanging together and talking to one another and seldom to him, than by their actually forcing him aloof, would have enabled the most incurious eye to pick him out as a man who was not making one of the gang he worked with and remained with. After a bit the cook spoke to the German, who got up and went into the galley, whence he shortly afterwards brought to Miss Agnes and me some tea and bacon and biscuit. He put the tray down on the after skylight, and immediately walked forward again, in a hurried fashion, as

if he was afraid we should speak to him. Miss Agnes took a little tea, but I could not prevail upon her to eat. It was not so much terror in her—though God knows *that* would have been excusable enough—as consternation and despair, as I could see in the wildness and sadness of the glances she'd throw around those leagues of brilliant blue, that never appeared to me so cruel and measureless as then. When she'd look at the gangway, and think of the boat, you saw it was a thought that broke her down; but I know that the hardest and most terrible part of the idea in her then was the prospect of being cooped up, for it was impossible to say how long a time, with Grondhal and his mates. There was little I could think of to hearten her, though I did my best.

Indeed, I could not yet imagine what was going to happen, what villainous programme the men had prepared. Once it occurred to me that they meant to land us in the boat, and leave us there with her and run away with the ship; but a moment's reflection assured me that that was not likely, as it was impossible for them to know that the ship was not as hard, fast, and immovable as they had professed to me to believe her, and it was not to be conceived, therefore, that they would base any plans upon so great an uncertainty as that. No; their project, no doubt, was to plunder the ship, and then get me to steer the boat for the Brazilian coast, for some part of it near Pernambuco, perhaps, where they could land with their plunder, and, as shipwrecked mariners, make their way to the city or nearest town or village, taking care to separate from us that we should not be able to inform against them. This, I say, was my theory of what they intended to do. They took about an hour to eat their breakfast and smoke their pipes. From time to time Grondhal would stand up and carefully search the horizon as if he expected a sail to heave in sight, though it looked to me more as though he was afraid of that happening, unless, indeed, he was studying the weather. The sun was burning hot, but spaces of the quarter-deck were shadowed by the canvas, and so Miss Agnes and I found shelter from the roasting rays whilst we waited for the next thing to happen. Glancing during this time towards the northern island, I noticed what had not before caught my eye; namely, a couple of heavy, thick, black pieces of wood standing upright in the sand. I fetched the telescope and examined them, and found them, as I considered, to be the remains of a beacon, though at first I had imagined them to form part of a buried wreck. The blaze came off the sand in a blinding shining, and for some moments the sight of my right eye was completely darkened after I had put down the glass. Yet the light breeze held, blowing tenderly into the backed topsails and softly shaking the canvas that hung from the yards in the grip of the clewlines, whilst the blue ripples made a kind of music over the side, and you could hear the quiet streaming of the tide over the shallow ground and the fountain-like *plashing of foam here and there.*

"Come along, poys; led's get on now," I heard Grondhal say; and the men, still keeping their pipes in their mouths, went to work afresh. The boat's mast and sail had been already placed in her, and I was puzzled therefore to know what they wanted with another sail—a topmast studding-sail it looked to me—which they had taken the trouble to get up from forward out of the sail-room. This they passed into the boat; and then the Finn came up to me.

"Now, Mishter Aubyn," said he, glancing at Miss Agnes as he spoke, "ve are all retty to leave der ship. You know de arrangement. Vill you und de lady please to get into der poat?"

My heart fell to feverishly beating, and my head seemed like to split with the passion that seized me. He saw it in my eyes, and the cur fell back a step with a look towards his mates who stood at the gangway watching us. I controlled myself till my voice was little more than a low tremble. "Consider the weather, Grondhal, and think how it may be possible to float the ship by a struggle. For God's sake, don't let us abandon her without an attempt."

"Look here," he exclaimed loudly, that his mates might hear; "dere ship is hardt und fast, und ve don't mean to preak our packs ober an impossible shob. Now you hear. Ve are all equals, and dere mashority is vor doin' vot ve mean ter do. Lady, take de gentleman's arm, or shall I hond you inter der poat myself?"

Miss Inglefield hurriedly seized my arm and held it with the tightness of a death-clutch. The Finn looked at her with a grin, and then turning his face towards the others, burst into a loud laugh.

"Just repeat your plans, will you?" said I.

This was heard by Eye, who, before Grondhal could answer, called out, "The plans are to convey provisions and water to that there sand-island, and get what we may reckon necessary out of the ship agin a change o' weather that may happen in a hour—for who's agoin' to trust the sky near the hequator? When we've landed all we want, hincluding your chart, and anything else you may need, vy, then we shall tarn to and victual and fit out the boat for the woyage to Pernambuco; and considering that the ship's as useless now as if she was under water, then, if there's e'er a man as could say our plans wern't shipshape and such as sailor-men should dewise arter they've been cast away, why, I'm game for one to stand up to the bloomin' lubber, if he wur twice as big as Grondhal there. So come along, mister. Don't keep us waitin' all day."

"I see how it is," I whispered to Miss Agnes; "they're too modest to rifle the cabins whilst we're on board. Come! we must have courage. But oh for a ten minutes' loan of poor Pipes's revolver, with Nipper there to back me!" and with that I walked with the girl to the gangway, and without a pause handed her into the boat and followed. "Me und der cook'll shtop here to preak out *more groob* und tings," exclaimed the Finn; "Sharley und Sholomon'll pe honds enough to discharge dere poat und pring her pack for us und vot ve shall preak out."

Nipper came down the side at once, just giving me a look as he took his seat on a thwart. Eye and the understeward followed, as obedient to Grondhal's word of command as men-of-war-men to the order of an officer. They threw their oars out, and in a few seconds we were gliding away from the *Silver Sea* and rowing through the ripples, whose tiny featherings went eastwards with the tide, towards the northern island. The water was never so shallow that the boat was in danger of grounding till her stem touched the bank, though again and again the white bottom looked to glisten up to within an inch or two of the blue surface. It was enough to craze the mind to see the ship lying there in her beauty and completeness, and feel that nothing but the scoundrelism of the man who owed his life to her stood between her and her chance of floating once more. The heel of her gave the masts the bland inclination they'd take in sailing, and at the first glance any one would have supposed that she had been awkwardly hove-to, with all three topsails aback. The thought came into me, as I glanced from Eye's half-drunken face to the tallowy chops of the German, that if Nipper and I chose to fall upon these men—and the mastering of them to us would have been as easy as saying how d'y'e do—we might without difficulty secure the Finn. But I speedily saw we could do ourselves no good by so acting; because, suppose, after we had mastered Grondhal, the men consented to try to float the ship and found that she was not to be stirred; in that case we should have to take to the boat; the Finn would come too, as we could not act so inhumanly as to leave him behind; and when we were together, he might regain his influence over the others, so that our shipwreck might as easily as not end in our murder!

However, very little time was allowed me for thinking. The German and the ordinary seaman rowed with a long hearty stroke, and in a few minutes the boat lay alongside the sand-island. Nipper sprang out, and I followed and helped Miss Agnes to land. The coral sand was alive with land-crabs and a kind of crawling vermin that resembled earwigs, and many gulls and sea-fowl squatted, or stood, or wobbled about uttering peculiar cries; but such was their wildness, so unused were they to the sight of man, that they did not move at our approach nor take the least notice of us, and when I jumped out of the boat I had to kick two or three of them out of my way that I should not tread upon them. The heat struck up through our boots as though what we stood on was lava newly hove up out of the heart of a volcano; and the glare came off the white sand in a dazzle that seemed to swim like a mist into the blue, turning the sky into trembling silver to as high as a tree all away round the ocean, looking at it from the island. About a musket-shot to the right lay a complete human skeleton, with fragments of clothes upon its arms and legs; some bones were near it, and bits of bleached wreckage. The skeleton

lay on its back ; it caught my eye instantly, and I never remember experiencing the like of the shock caused me by the sight of that lonesome mocking outline looking straight up to God with its empty eyes and horrible grin.

Eye jumped out of the boat, leaving the German in her. The height of the sandbank above the water would vary with the tide ; it was now between ten and twelve feet, and would be less later on when the water had come to its height. The bank sloped easily, and it was a sign that refreshed me after the sight of the skeleton when I observed that on the eastern and southern side of the island, any way, there were no marks on the sand to denote that stormy weather had been here recently.

"What's that sail for?" demanded Nipper, as the ordinary seaman called to him to give him a hand to get what I had taken to be a studdingsail out of the boat.

"Why, Grondhal thought it 'ud sarve as a tent—specially for the lady, as it's blazing warm here, and no mistake," answered Eye. "See them uprights?" pointing to the massive pieces of timber standing in the sand. Well, they'll do for stanchions, and you can slope the sail down astarn so that there'll be room in the shadder it'll cast for all hands. Charley, ye might be a settin' of it up, whilst me and Fritz unloads the boat. Mr. Aubyn'll lend you a hand, I dessay. He'll be glad to get the lady out o' the sun."

"Yes," answered Nipper; "that's all very well; but if the Finn's so thoughtful about the lady, what did he want to land her here for? Why wasn't her and Mr. Aubyn kept aboard, where there's shelter enough, till we was all ready to sail away in the boat seein' as you wouldn't try to get the ship off?"

"Didn't Grondhal explain? If arrangements is made, what's the use of muckin' about and shifting of them?" exclaimed the ordinary seaman with a sullen look at Nipper. "What we're now doin' was settled and agreed to, and so what's the use of askin' questions? It's all plain enough, ain't it?"

Startled by the dark look that came into Nipper's face, for it was enough that Miss Inglefield was one of us to make the need of keeping peace among the men an imperious necessity, though God knows this ordinary seaman's speech and manner was bitter provocation to a man whose grade was above his, who knew himself to be an honest, nimble, first-rate sailor, and who was twelve or fifteen years older than the brutish youth, I hastily said, "This sail's a good thought of the Finn's, Nipper. The sun is scorching, and Miss Inglefield, I know, will be grateful for shelter from it. I'll lend you a hand, with pleasure, to spread it."

"Lay hold, then, sir," he exclaimed; and hoisting it, rolled up as it was, on to our shoulders, we trailed it along over land-crabs and earwigs and staring, unmoved sea-fowl, black and grey and

piebald, to the posts. It proved to be an upper topsail, and after some trouble we managed to secure two corners to the posts and to contrive a kind of shallow tent with a portion of the sail heaped up in it as a seat for Miss Agnes. It was *her* presence that caused Nipper and me to say very little of what was in our minds. There was a boat voyage before her, and the association of the abominable men for some days, perhaps; and it would have been cruel to speak of them, as we both knew they were to be spoken of, though I *now* know that nothing that we might have said could increase the terror with which she viewed them.

All this while Eye and the German were working hard over the contents of the boat, and the last bag of bread was flung ashore whilst Nipper and I were still fiddling over the "awning."

"They are going back to the ship," said Miss Agnes.

I turned and perceived Eye in the act of shoving the boat's head off. "That's part of their programme," said I, wiping my streaming face. "They'll now fill their pockets, and then put more provisions in the boat, and bottles of drink—which they have forgotten in their first load," pointing to what had been left on the sand, "and come to us to be steered for the Brazil coast. Why, Nipper, they're evidently as much ashamed to break open and plunder before you as before us, to judge by their leaving you here."

He stood silent a moment or two looking thoughtfully at the receding boat. "They've got a round-about way of going to work!" he exclaimed, taking a deep breath. "Seems to me that the idea of that their sail was more as a roose to give me a job here in order to keep me away than thoughtfulness for the lady. They don't trust me, of course. But do the fools reckon that I couldn't just as well tell what they're after now they're alone as if I stood by and saw 'em overhauling the luggage and the cases and taking all that's easily stowed away? Maybe they'll quarrel, though. They'll have to make shares, and the Finn's that gluttonous he may get a knife in him yet, and specially if they start off drinkin'."

"Well, we must attend their pleasure," said I. "Come, let's get under shelter and wait. Great heaven! what will be the glare of the sun upon our heads in that boat! Oh, the villains! Look at the ship, Nipper! Surely, surely she was to have been got afloat!"

We had been waiting for four hours. The sun was now almost high overhead, and a man's shadow was no more than a short blotch. That fiery eye pouring down its blinding light and the dazzle it flashed up off the coral sand would have been unbearable but for the merciful shelter of the sail. For four hours, I say, we had been waiting. All that time the boat lay alongside the ship, but not once did the men show themselves. There was no use in being impatient. We all three of us knew what the scoundrels were about, and I, for one, had fully expected that they would take *plenty of time* to ransack, so that no object of value that was plun-

derable under the circumstances might escape them. Once, when about three hours of the time had passed, Miss Agnes said, "Do you think they will try to get the ship off, and sail away and leave us here?" It was a startling question, and I looked at Nipper, who answered, "No, that's not their intention. If they meant it they'd have turned to at once and run an anchor out and gone to work. The ship 'ud be too risky for them to sail about in. She might be boarded, and what story have they got? Then, again, who's there to navigate her? No, miss, don't be afraid of them carrying the ship away. This here grounding has given 'em the chance they've been looking for. If the boat's met with, why, they're shipwrecked men, who saved all they could afore they abandoned the wessel; and if they're forced to give the property up, by your informing against 'em, why, then they'd try for salvage money. They feel, of course, that they must take their chance. But you'll find they'll not put themselves in the way of being picked up. They'll get you to steer the boat plump for the coast. That's the idea in 'em. sir."

"Would you put all this business down to the Finn?" I asked.

"Ay, the whole boilin' of it, from first to last."

"But wasn't there plenty of surliness and mutinous feelings amongst them all whilst we were beating about for the wreck—enough to account for what they're now about there?" I said, pointing to the ship.

"Why, yes, there was, quite enough; they only wanted to be told what to do, and that the Finn found out. One of the worst was the steward. My notion is, it was his talking about the money and things in the cabin that put the scheme of plundering the wessel into the Finn's head. The cook's a scowbanker, but the least harmful, and'll be glad, I lay, to be home and out o' this job. But there's none as could be trusted, or I'd have tried my hand upon him."

"I am quite sure now that that dreadful Finn murdered poor Captain Pipes," said Miss Agnes.

"So am I," answered Nipper.

"Oh, Mr. Aubyn!" she cried passionately, "what would I give—what would I give to escape being cooped up in that boat with him and with the others!"

"It will not be for long," I exclaimed, taking her hand. "The Brazilian coast is not above a hundred and thirty miles distant, the build of the boat is warrant enough that she is a swift sailer, and supposing she never exceeds four miles an hour, we shall be able to make the land in little more than a day and night."

"Besides, miss, the men's not likely to trouble you," said Nipper. "You'll sit well aft with Mr. Aubyn, and you'll find they won't meddle with you. Their wish is to avoid passing ships and get ashore as soon as possible; this'll give them enough to think about, and you'll find it'll keep 'em sober too, which'll be a good job, for the boat'll need to be a sight larger than she is if there's to be any drunken wranglin' and skylarkin'."

At the end of the four hours it was about a quarter past twelve. The heat had dried the wind up, though a light air still stole across the calm blue and gave a faint movement to the white royals at the ship's mastheads. Suddenly a man stepped through the gangway into the boat; he was followed by another, whilst the Finn and the cook remained on deck and lowered or tossed a quantity of articles to the others alongside. We could not clearly see all that they put into the boat, but it was certain that they were provisioning and watering her liberally; so much so, indeed, that Nipper broke out, "Are they going to take a holiday on this here island, that they're filling up with water and grub in that style? why," he exclaimed, pointing to the breakers and biscuit and hams, &c., which lay on the sand, "have they forgot that there's enough *there* to last a dozen of us six such voyages as we're goin' to make? Well, they may be right to take care we don't run short; but it'll bring the boat middling deep if they keep all on as they're now doing."

We continued watching them intently. They took about half an hour to load the boat with what they wanted; and then after a pause, during which I supposed they were taking a good look round, the Finn and the cook went over the side into the boat, and at once stepped the mast, whilst I could see Eye clearing away the sail ready for hoisting. It was now that the conviction of their real intention smote me, and I seemed to feel the beating of my heart stop as though I had been struck by lightning, whilst the skin of my face grew tense and cold as marble under the paralyzing emotion of despair that seized me. Yet I did not speak. I just glanced at Nipper, who was watching the boat steadfastly, and then turned my eyes again upon her. Suddenly the men in her shoved off, and at the same moment they hoisted the sail. As they did this, Nipper sprang from under the tent and reached the margin of the sand in a few frantic bounds.

"Boat ahoy!" he yelled, in a voice so wild and piercing that several black gulls, which might have passed for stuffed birds for their stolidity, took wing with cries of alarm and went flapping heavily away to sea; "for God Almighty's sake don't leave the lady and us two men on this island." Their only answer was to throw out a couple of oars, haul aft the sheet of the lugsail, and with Grondhal at the helm, head due westwards. Thrice did Nipper hail them, but no answer was returned; indeed, I would even swear that the Finn did not so much as look back, whilst the German who was in the bows lighted a pipe.

"Oh, the murderers! Oh, the murderers!" cried Nipper, raising his clenched fists above his head in a paroxysm of rage, and then combing the sweat off his brow, he came with staggering steps to where Miss Agnes and I stood watching the boat that, under the combined propulsion of the oars and the small wind, was *sliding fast away towards the deeper blue of the ocean, past the water lying shallow and pale upon the reef.*

CHAPTER XLVI.

WE RETURN TO THE SHIP.

FOR a couple of minutes—which for my part might have been an hour, so crammed were those short seconds with suffering and passion and cruel imagination—for a couple of minutes, I say, after Nipper had rejoined us, we stood staring from the shadow of the sail at the receding boat. On a sudden Miss Agnes cried out, “Oh, Mr. Aubyn, I would rather be here, I would rather be as that skeleton there is, than with those men. They have left us to our fate—but what is that fate to be? Have we no chance whatever to save our lives?”

Had she not spoken I should have lacked courage for some time to look at her, so fearful was I of the effect of the men’s vile and murderous treachery upon her mind. It was enough to have deprived a much stronger-hearted woman than she of her senses; for not the pen of the greatest genius that can be named could set before you even a faint representation of the sense of loneliness, of the deadly mortal feeling of despair, that came drawing into the heart out of the four corners of the boundless flashing ocean as the boat dwindled in the distance and left us looking from her to the fixed, still, silent, deserted ship. But it was not more the words of, than the note in, the girl’s speech that caused me to turn swiftly to her. She was not smiling; she was white as the sand we stood on; but the expression of pain and fear that had been in her face all day had passed; the going of the boat had soothed and comforted her as surely as though help had heaved in sight, and there was a wonderful look of gratefulness and thankfulness in her mild and gentle blue eyes as she raised them to mine.

“Nipper,” said I, “do you hear what the lady says? We must take heart, man. You have been a good friend to us. You have stuck to us nobly. We are still together and are two men in good health, possessed of spirit and resolution, and we have a girl’s life to save as well as our own. Have we no chance? The land is not many leagues distant, and there must be ships about to fall in with. How are we to get away from this reef? That’s the problem, and it must be solved.”

“Oh, Mr. Aubyn!” he burst out, in a voice thickened with suppressed tearless sobs and the rage that still worked in him; “they are brutal, bloody murderers to act in this way, to maroon us on a bit of sand without a boat to git away in, and nothen but a hard and fast ship to watch fall to pieces!”

“No!” I interrupted vehemently.

“Look at *that*!” he cried, pointing to the skeleton; “*that’s* the meanin’ they had in their minds all along. I never thought it of ‘em. I allowed that they had the feelin’s and intentions of devils, but devils wouldn’t act to one of their own kind as those men have acted to me who’ve bin their shipmate and messmate, and to you and the lady here who’s never done ‘em harm. Now you see, sir,

how plain it all is why we was to be landed here with those provisions, and why the Finn,—may God's curse fall upon him as he sits there!—sent this sail ashore, with orders to Eye to contrive that I should be left behind to spread it!"

He shook his fist in the direction of the boat, whilst his face darkened and his eyes gleamed to the passion that surged up in him. It is always best to let outbreaks of temper in such natures as this man's have their way. At sea the privilege of "growling," as it is called, has saved many a mutiny; and though cursing is a vile habit, a deal of bloodshed, I warrant, has been saved through men exploding out their wrath in oaths. I knew Nipper would calm down presently, but that until he did calm down there would be no good in discussing what ought now to be done; so for a space we went on talking about the rascality of the men, of the cunning they had shown in landing us in this trap, of the devilish consistency with which they had acted their parts, every man of them, from the onset. A good share of Nipper's rage was directed against himself, for now that the game was played and the trick was easy to understand, he was astounded that he should not have seen it.

"Yes, yes," said I, "that's all very well, Nipper; but see here: the men had made up their minds to plunder the ship and go off with their booty without you and me and Miss Inglefield; it didn't matter to them whether they left us aboard the ship or on this sandbank, but I dare say they considered it would be easier to get rid of us by landing us, since, if we were on board when they shoved off, our desperation might lead us into giving them a great deal of trouble. So they formed their plans; they meant we should come into them, and had we refused they would have used force—and what might that have ended in? Our murder, maybe, and no one to stand between this lady and yonder beasts. No, man; what has happened has happened. We must look our position in the face. But as I know Miss Inglefield has tasted no food since yesterday, suppose we first of all try to get a meal out of those stores there?"

I spoke cheerily, and I wonder when I look back how I managed it; for at heart I was so depressed that had my will relaxed its grip of my emotions to the smallest extent, I am sure I should have been prostrated by despair of a wild and dangerous character. One, shock had followed another so rapidly that no time was given me to rally; and now the last of them that had come was the very worst that could have happened; as what man would not own who had stood with us on that little sandbank in the midst of the great deep and marked the white sail of the boat that had abandoned us glimmering no bigger than a star away out upon the sea, and then looked at the fixed and useless ship and at her empty davits, and then up at the sky, made brassy by the wide and ardent flaming of the sun, and rendering the expanse of waters, to our low-pitched vision, illimitable by the manner in which the arching of the glaring vault *seemed to take the horizon away with it into its own stupendous*

distances? Yet I managed to speak cheerily and to behave as if I felt so. I fetched some biscuit and tinned meat, and then Nipper brought a breaker of water with him to the tent, as I may call the extended sail, and we made out a meal in true shipwreck fashion, eating with our fingers, and using the tin from which we had extracted the meat as a cup. Nipper grew more and more reflective, and I'd notice him eating with his eyes fixed on the ship and a frown of deep thought upon his weather-stained forehead. As for Miss Agnes, the going away of the men appeared to have neutralized the horror our position excited in her. Maybe as a woman and wanting a sailor's knowledge, she had not yet grasped the full significance of our plight; but certain it is that there had come into her gentle face more of the old looks I had been used to see in the time of Edwards and Hornby than had lain there ever since our friends had boarded the wreck.

"I've got a pipe in my pocket, Mr. Aubyn," said Nipper presently; "would the lady object to my lighting it?"

"Certainly not," she exclaimed,

He cut a pipeful of tobacco off a stick of cavendish, thinking hard all the while, with his eyes on the ship; asked me for a light, which I gave him; and, after puffing hard for some moments, squatted himself down on the sand, and said, "We must get aboard the ship, Mr. Aubyn; and how's that to be done?"

"How?" said I, reckoning he knew.

"Well, I must swim aboard of her. It won't be much of a swim. At low water, I allow, this reef'll uncover to near a hundred fathom along. That'll bring me nearer to the ship by six hundred feet."

"But the lady and I can't swim on board, Nipper."

"No, and there'll be no need. What I've got to do is plain enough. I must bring the end of a line ashore, and made it fast to one of these uprights. With that I can haul myself backwards and forwards."

"Well?" I exclaimed, listening eagerly, for he had again paused to think.

"There's a quantity of planks down in the half-deck," he continued; "ye might have taken notice of them when we overhauled the vessel in search of Captain Pipes. A few of them pitched overboard and lashed together'll make a raft big enough to support the three of us. I'll haul it off here by the line, and we can haul ourselves back again the same way."

I was struck by this ready planning. "But what follows, Nipper? what are we to do when we get on board the ship?"

"Mr. Aubyn," he answered impressively, "look around you, sir. 'Tis all water. There's no boat in that wessel, as you know. We can't stop here; we couldn't remain in *her*, for, soft as she slid into *it*, ye may guess by the looks of the ground around *her* that it *wouldn't* take much of a breeze to bring *her* and us to that condition," pointing in a sort of shuddering way to the skeleton and the rattle of

wreckage and bones near it. "What must we do, then, but turn to and build a raft as fast as ever our hands can manage it, and shove away out to sea, trustin' to Almighty God to bring us deliverance."

"Yes," said I, turning to Miss Agnes, who had followed Nipper's words with intense eagerness, "there is no other resource. But we have the materials and tools for constructing a raft that should prove fully as safe as the boat, if not so handy and fast; so our lot will not be much harder than had we gone with the others in the boat."

"It will not be so hard," she exclaimed quickly. "We shall be alone. We shall not have those dreadful men with us."

But how could she be expected to know what lay before us? How could she be supposed to understand the experiences a raft was sure to furnish us with? I might have foreseen, by looking at the stranded ship, that it must come to a raft, for how else were we to get away from the island? But when the prospect was brought home to me by Nipper's plain words, my heart quailed, despite what I had said to Miss Agnes. Somehow, the putting off from a sinking ship in a raft had always affected me, in reading of such things, as the direst part of shipwreck. I associated unspeakable human anguish with it; long days and nights of famine and maddening thirst, of maniacal outbreaks, of deadly conflicts, of the silence of exhaustion, with the wash of wave after wave to carry off some white corpse or some yet breathing skeleton. However, it would not do to let such fancies as these work in me; so I broke away from them by lighting a cigar, and throwing myself alongside Nipper, and talking away as fast as I could ply my tongue, for I was just then in a condition when the vilest thing that could have befallen me would have been my being left alone with no other company but my own thoughts. Ah, Heaven preserve me! Here had I started in sound condition to help Mr. Edwards to chase health down the two Atlantics, and, if I was not drowned or starved, or destroyed in some other way, I now bade fair to end infinitely more ill than my gouty friend had begun!

Well, the afternoon wore on, though the sun was still high in the north-west, when the ebbing tide had left a long stretch of the reef uncovered, whilst the ship heeled to a larger angle as the water sank around her bows and sides. Nipper walked to the margin of the sandbank, and, returning, said that he allowed the tide was slack enough for him now, and he might as well start at once. I agreed with him, for it would be dark when the sun set, and the moon rose very late. "But are you a good swimmer?" said I, anxiously.

"Good enough for that job," he answered, looking at the ship.

"Why not secure a couple of bits of that wreckage there," said I, pointing to the litter near the bones, "under your arms?"

"They'd only hinder me," he answered; "and yet I dunno; I might be glad of them for all I can tell."

So saying, he went and selected a couple of small pieces of the old wood, the remains of a ship that had gone to pieces here

Heaven alone knows how many years ago, stripped himself to his dungaree trousers, secured the wood to him by means of the small stuff with which the rolled up sail we were now using for a tent had been "stopped," and walked straight into the water.

"Miss Agnes and I watched the black point of his head steadily nearing the ship till he came to the steps which hung down the vessel's side, he then hauled himself out of the water, went hand over fist up the ladder, and disappeared.

"A plucky fellow!" I exclaimed. "He swam the distance quickly. I dare say he be'd wondering if there were sharks about, as I did, though I was frightened to hint such a thing; but he took the water gamely. Nipper is a real English sailor. Would to God the rest had been like him!"

"I am sure, Mr. Aubyn," she said, "that when it came to the point, you would not have got me to go into the boat with the Finn. Do you know what I believe he would have done had he taken us? After you had steered him near the land, he would have thrown us overboard that there might be no witnesses against him and the other odious wretches to prove that they had robbed the cabins."

It was not a time for merriment; yet I could not help laughing at the knowing manner in which she spoke, and the horror that dilated her blue eyes, and the warmth in her voice. There never was a gentler woman, yet I believe, had we been in a position to hang Grondhal, she would have been glad to slip the noose over his ugly head.

After a pretty good while we saw Nipper come to the gangway, and drop a plank overboard, evidently secured by a line to prevent it floating away, though it was too far off to tell that. In a few minutes he let fall another plank, and then another, and so on till about eight or ten of them were lying alongside. He then came down the steps, and I could see him securing these planks to one another by lashings. By the time he had rafted them, nearly an hour had passed since he had left the sandbank. When he had ended, he climbed on deck again, and flung down some more planks, which he secured on top of the first platform; then once more returned to the ship, and remained out of sight for near upon a quarter of an hour. He now reappeared, and, getting upon the raft, began to coil down a length of line upon it, and, when that was done, he yet once more boarded the ship, and descended with a boat's oar, with which he shoved off.

Now began some tedious work. The raft was heavy, and the sculling and paddling of her with one oar very laborious; yet inch by inch he propelled the fabric towards the island, the line (the end of which was attached to the ship near the gangway) paying out as he approached, until, drawing it to very shoal water, he was enabled to pole it along after the manner of the old Tyne keelmen. He asked me to hold on to the raft whilst he made the end of the line fast to one of the uprights in the sand. When this was done,

the line, which was ratline stuff, lay along the water between the sandbank and the ship.

"Since there was plenty of deals aboard," said he, "I thought, whilst I was about it, that I might as well lash enough of 'em together to carry the three of us aboard. But," added he, with a look at the sun, "we shan't be able to do much afore it comes on dark unless we work by lamplight."

"That would be rather exhausting work," said I. "The weather looks wonderfully fine and settled. The ship should be safe enough to pass the night in, one of us keeping a look-out, and there's shelter and her own bed for Miss Inglefield; things she ought to have, but which she wouldn't get here."

"Oh, the ship'll be safe enough," he exclaimed; "besides, if it should come on to blow, there's always that there raft at the gang-way, and this line to drag ourselves ashore with. Sleepin' on sand ain't pleasant; I don't know that it ain't worse than rock when it's full of land-crabs. Then there's the birds. Ye'll have thousands of 'em returning from foragin' at sundown, and, though a gull's soft enough to lie on, he don't usually smell as sweet as a mattress oughter, 'ticularly when he's in a crowd. But that's the thing," he continued, pointing to the skeleton, "I'd least relish when it came on dark. I wouldn't so much mind if it wur broke; but it's whole, an' could stand up if it had power, ay, an' run after a man too; and if I got thinkin' about it," said he, wiping the palms of his hands on his wet trousers, and then picking up his shirt and vest, "when you was asleep and this island dark, it 'ud make me feel uncomfortable."

He speedily dressed himself. I then called to Miss Inglefield, and the three of us got upon the raft. It was substantial enough to support us easily, consisting as it did of two tiers of deals securely lashed together by a man who very perfectly well knew his work as a sailor. Miss Agnes and I sat down upon it, whilst Nipper dragged the fabric towards the ship by means of the rope; the stores which had been landed by Eye and the German being left where they were, in case we should be suddenly driven by a change of weather into quitting the vessel. It was only that morning since we had abandoned the *Silver Sea*, yet to me it seemed a week, so cruelly and heavily had the hours been freighted with suffering and anxiety. There was infinite bitterness and grief in me whilst I watched her as we slowly approached. There she lay, a beautiful, perfect, shapely fabric, with her glossy sides gleaming to the reddening rays of the westering sun, and her square black yards scored with the festooned canvas, or the white squares of the topsails rising one above another on the tapering masts, whose trucks glimmered like pieces of silver against the soft afternoon sapphire of that golden tropical day; there she lay, with the slack blue tide crawling around her well-exposed cutwater, leaning down upon the sandy bed on to which she had slid in the attitude

of a vessel sailing swiftly through it under a strong beam wind, with scarce any other discernible movement aboard of her than the delicate fluttering of the vane at the masthead to the light breathings which kissed our hot cheeks like the waftings of a fan ; looking, I thought, now that the low tide exposed a fairish deal of her forward, an incomparably fine model, from the lovely run that went gently swelling aft from the bluff of the bows, with that moderate fulness of side you get in the old clippers, along with the knife-like sharpness forward where the bows sloped down to the forefoot ; there she lay, with the strong light shining dim in the wet dull gold of her sheathing, and the deep, clear eastern sky looking to flow, like the atmosphere itself, through the tracery of her rigging, and betwixt the yards, and round past the sheeny, satin-like edges of the sails ; there she lay ! yet had the whole, graceful, and elegant structure fallen down before us as we gazed, and been swept in rude squadrons of planks and beams and spars by the tide upon the sandbanks, she could not have seemed more hopelessly useless to us than we then found her as we eyed the ship, drawing slowly towards her upon the raft.

We reached the gangway ladder, and I assisted Miss Agnes on board. The slant of the deck was mighty deceptive ; it made you feel that the ship was sailing at the rate of knots, and it positively needed a glance at the aback topsails and the canvas hanging motionless in the red atmosphere to dispossess me of that notion. Well, here we were aboard the *Silver Sea* again, anyhow, and I took a long look in the direction of the ocean whither the boat was gone. But there was not a glimpse to be seen of her ; the tiny white of her sail had been absorbed in the azure dimness in the eastern distance ; nothing was visible but the gleam of the silky wings of white fowl mixed with the dark outlines of dusky birds, some as black as rooks, coming home to rest upon the islands, and marking their approach by many singular cries, the very shrillest of which somehow partook of a plaintive character from the solitude of the reef and the speechless and unbroken expanse of ocean, that looked up with a kind of great, blind, unmeaning stare at the sky glaring down, for all its loveliness of colour, unmeaningly and blindly too. We had made up our minds to do no work that night ; we were not only too weary, there was not much daylight left, the night would come along dark, and it would not do to trust our lives to a raft constructed by lamplight when we could easily stay till the morning under the promise made us of tranquil weather by the departing sun and the cloudless heavens. So the first thing we did was to light the galley fire, that we might presently get a proper meal to eat, and then we went below to see what the men had left of our property there. Nipper told us he had not stopped to examine for himself when he came aboard, so he was as fresh to the sight as we were ; and not a little astonishing it was, I assure you. The scoundrels had got all

the boxes and trunks of the Inglefields up from where they had been stowed below, had burst the locks, and turned the contents out, covering the cabin deck with a hundred articles of attire. I never saw such a muddle of clothes, male and female. Why on earth the Inglefields had brought such a stock with them I could not imagine; there was enough here to last them for a three years' voyage, including balls and jollities at every port put into. We then made the round of the cabins, and a pretty mess we found them in. The fellows had stolen everything that was small, everything that they could secrete, just as I had reckoned they would: the handsome and costly dressing-cases were smashed to pieces for the gold and silver fittings which could not otherwise be removed: and the clearest possible sweep had been made of all rings, money, jewellery and the like, as both Miss Inglefield and I very speedily found out when we came to inspect our own cabins.

"And how much in value do you suppose they've taken, sir?" Nipper asked me.

"Impossible to say," I replied; "but I don't suppose I could buy what I have lost for less than 250*l.*, including 60*l.* in gold, which the beasts have taken; and if you'll double that sum on every one of the other ladies and gentlemen—for who's to know how much money Mr. Edwards and Mr. Hornby had with them——"

"I know papa had 200*l.*, chiefly in bank-notes," said Miss Agnes.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" cried Nipper. "Why, it's enough to set each man up for life if he can manage to get his dollop of the booty ashore. And, Mr. Aubyn, depend upon it that murderin' Finn has had his eye on it all along, and meant business the hinstant the loss of our two boats guv him the chance. Reef or no reef, he and the others 'ud have had what they've gone off with; and my notion is that we ought to feel mighty grateful that this here hisland came and shoved hisself in our road: for if the ship hadn't gone ashore, it's my humble opinion that the Finn and his friends 'ud ha' chucked you an' me an' the lady overboard, since it's quite plain now that they never intended we should be in their way."

"I am exactly of that opinion, Nipper," exclaimed Miss Agnes; and then, turning to me, she exclaimed tearfully, "Oh, Mr. Aubyn, how could you wonder that I would rather have *died* on the island than enter the boat with those villains?"

Nipper eyed her as if struck by her prettiness. "Tell ye what it is, miss," said he; "there's no need to talk of dying on the hisland or anywe'er's else *yet*. Wood was made to swim, and there's plenty of it on this here hooker. Only give me a spell of fine weather, and you shall bile me in the galley coppers if I don't turn you out as pretty a sea-goin' raft, fit to ratch or run with any reg'lar built wessel of four times her size, as the heye ever saw afloat."

CHAPTER XLVII.

WE LEAVE THE REEF.

WE had inspected the half-deck and found plenty of deals in it, ten inches wide and twenty feet long, for the construction of a large powerful raft, and there was also, for lashing, plenty of small twelve-thread ratline stuff; and we had also taken note of a couple of stump top-gallant masts lying among the booms forward, exactly fitted to serve as a foundation for the raft; so that, although we did nothing that evening, we knew that we had all the materials we required for going to work the first thing on the following morning, to build a fabric as likely to serve us as well as a good boat. This we had done, I say, and we had made a substantial meal, and had spent some while after sunset in talking over the past and in making arrangements for next day and afterwards; and Nipper and I had agreed between us to keep a look-out, he going below until midnight, and I then turning in to sleep till dawn.

There was indeed nothing to keep a look-out for except a change of weather. No ship was likely to approach within miles of this dangerous reef; and even the weather looked as fixed as the vessel herself, though of course it was not to be trusted. In twenty minutes it might come on to blow fresh enough to make the ship's life not worth the snuff of a candle; or, what would have been equally bad, one of those sudden swells which will come running up out of the shadow of a storm many leagues distant, might wash up round the ship and set her grinding her bottom out before we should have time to drop on to the raft and haul ourselves ashore by the line—if indeed it was not parted by the first movement of the vessel. So a look-out was necessary, and I kept the first watch, though it was not a lonely one up to ten o'clock.

But after that! Why, it was not five minutes after Miss Agnes had wished me good-night and gone to her cabin, before the mighty solitude in the heart of which we lay motionless was pressing upon me with a weight I feared would break down my mind, with a heaviness I believed I should not be able to support until Nipper's time below was up. To *him* it would have been mere sea and sky, with a cursed reef holding the ship tight, as though it was Davy Jones's grip fixing her till a breeze of wind came along to rock her into staves; but to me the whole loneliness of the vast Atlantic Ocean seemed concentrated in the space girdled by the low-lying stars. There was no movement in the air; the atmosphere was like the sky, without a stir; you could hear the tide, fretting in a kind of bubbling and gurgling, away over the bows, around the islands that lay there as bright as if they were sheets of moonlight; *but no other sound came off the deep, distant or near, saving always the unspeakable crying of the hundreds of birds, which methought were more sleepless in their way than even those elements of air*

and water which they haunted ; for assuredly old ocean slumbered that night, and if it hadn't been for the twinkling of the stars which gave a liveliness to the darkness up there, you would have sworn the winds had folded their wings and had fallen in a trance upon the luminous polished bosom of the deep.

Well, I managed to scrape through the time, spite of some mighty nervous fancies touching the white skeleton that rested upon the sand, and the story I made for it and the other remains of the ship and men ; but I was glad enough when I found it to be midnight by my watch. It was not yet high water, but the rising of the tide, which on this reef has a rise and fall of about eight feet, as I afterwards came to learn, had lifted the vessel to a more level keel ; though so imperceptibly had the slant of the deck diminished, that I did not notice the circumstance until I went to call Nipper, and even then I gave it very little heed.

I had not been very long asleep before I was roused by Nipper, but very gently, so that I awoke without being startled. He said, "I'm truly sorry to wake you up, sir ; but something's happening that deserves your attention. It's given me the biggest idea that ever came into a shipwrecked man's mind, and I want you to step on deck to judge for yourself if it ain't to be done."

I had nothing to do but to put on my shoes and cap and follow him. What could be "happening," to use his term, I could not in the least imagine ; but it was plain some fine fancy for rescuing us—something else than the raft—had occurred to him, and that was quite enough to make me in a moment as wide awake as I was before I lay down. A fragment of red moon hung low over the stern. I followed Nipper to near the wheel, and he said, "Feel as hard as you can with your feet—you know what I mean, sir—and tell me if you can detect any sensation like a-comin' up out of the ship."

I did as he bid me, and for some moments was silent, during which I could hear the crying of the birds upon the sandbanks and the thin slopping sound of water.

"There's a faint stir in the ship, Nipper, the slightest possible movement, as of rolling, now and again. Is *that* what you want me to feel ?"

"That's it, sir," he exclaimed.

"And what of it ?"

"Why, it's put it into my head that the ship's willing to come off, if we'll help her to it."

"You and I ?"

"Why not, Mr. Aubyn ? 'Tain't likely I should have roused you up if I hadn't seen my way to what may be done with this here movement you're feelin' of. The ship's half afloat as it is. She hangs hard forward, it's true, but there's nothen in *that* to stop us."

"But what strength, Nipper, have you and I to warp this mass of tonnage out of its bed under the bows ? We are but two."

"Well, we're three, for the matter of that," said he ; "for I'm

quite sure the young lady wouldn't mind holding on to the slack whilst we turned the winch; and if she'll do that she'll be as good as a boy, anyway."

"She'll do anything she can, of course. But what is your scheme?" I exclaimed anxiously, for I had the feeling that what he meant to propose might prove practicable, but I was not sailor-man enough to be able to anticipate it.

"Look here, Mr. Aubyn; the ship's a wobblin', ain't she?"

"She's unquestionably stirring to some faint swell or movement in the water."

"Very well; it's now flood tide, and if she wobbles now it's proof that by lightening her she's bound to come off at high tide. That is, providin' we don't let her drift or wallow herself further up. How's that to be prevented? says you. Well, of course the first thing we must do when it comes on daylight is to turn to and carry the stream anchor out astarn and let her hold by it. Some manoeuvrin' 'll be wanted; but it's all planned out in my head. When that's done, we've got to lighten her. She'll be havin', I allow, about three hundred and fifty tons of ballast in her. By discharging eighty or a hundred ton she'll float; that's what I reckon. And when she floats, Mr. Aubyn, there'll be nothen to do but to steer her for the nearest port."

"You think it's to be done?" said I.

"Done!" he exclaimed warmly. "Ay, as easy as saying your prayers, and a good deal easier, I bet, than makin' a raft."

He might be unduly hopeful; but then, he was a sailor and knew what he was talking about; and whether the ship was to be got off or not, one thing was certain—the effort to get her off was worth making. Possibly I felt that even more than he; for not a little of the despondency that had fallen upon me before my look-out was up was due to the repugnance I had to embarking our lives on board a raft, no matter how ably and stoutly put together. Well, we chatted about it for some time, both of us full of excitement, until at last he begged me to go below and sleep till it was time to turn to, as what lay before us would need plenty of strength and perseverance.

"The chief blessin' to be asked," said he, looking aloft, "is a continuance of fine weather. Only let it keep as it is for the next two days, and ye shall drop me overboard head down and leave me there if the *Silver Sea* ain't afloat, ay, an' sailin' along on her way home."

He called me again at daybreak, and when I came on deck I found that during his watch he had emptied a beef-tierce, cut it in halves, made holes in the sides, and rove pieces of rope through them, thus furnishing us with a couple of tubs or buckets for slinging out the ballast with, as he told me he could find no baskets nor anything else fit for the work. Our first business was to lay out an anchor astern, and this job we desired to accomplish before the sun rose high in the heavens. The raft Nipper had constructed

on the previous day lay alongside and had ample buoyage power to answer our purpose. There was a boat's anchor forward, and this we got upon the raft; next we coiled down near it a length of small line, the end of which we made fast to a dead-eye in the lower mizzen rigging. This being done, we entered the raft and shoved and paddled and sculled it astern of the ship with a couple of oars, the line paying itself out as we went; and when we had gone far enough we hitched our end of the line to the anchor and threw it overboard. The simple object of this was to furnish us with a means to presently haul the raft and the heavier materials we should place upon her to the position we wanted, as it would have been impossible to propel with oars a fabric of deal planks lashed together and loaded down with a stream anchor and a small hawser, stout enough to hold the ship and warp her astern with.

This first proceeding was easy enough; the next tolerably arduous. First of all, we had to get the stream anchor over, and this obliged us to clap a tackle on to the yardarm; and when this was done we had to break out a manilla hawser that was down in the half-deck, pay it out on deck, and coil it on to the raft. But we worked with a will; it was a matter of life or death indeed, and I know for myself that I put the strength of two men into parts of the undertaking when there'd come a spell of flagging for the want of a stronger pull. Miss Agnes came on deck just as I was in the act of passing through the gangway into the raft. She stood stock-still, and the expression that rushed into her face satisfied me that for the instant she believed we were abandoning the ship in the raft and forgetting that she was left behind! She then ran across to me.

"Oh, Mr. Aubyn, where are you going?" she cried, with both her hands upon her heart.

"Not very far away," I replied, coming on deck to take her hand. "I'll explain all when I return. Enough now if I just say we are manœuvring to get the ship off this reef, and Nipper believes we shall do it. Walk right aft, and you'll be able to see what we are doing;" and time being very precious, I let fall her hand and dropped aboard the raft.

The end of the hawser had been secured to the winch, and it was my work to heave the fakes overboard as Nipper hauled the raft along by the line we had previously carried out. It *was* slow work, for the weight of the hawser as it grew in length astern made the raft hang, spite of Nipper's grim and iron hand-over-fisting of the rope secured to the boat's anchor; besides, we two men and the hawser and the big stream anchor weighted the raft pretty considerably. Indeed, but for the seamanly foresight of Nipper in anchoring a line to warp along with we shouldn't have been able to stir the raft from the ship's side. When we were clear of the ship's stern, I called out cheerily to Miss Agnes to encourage her, for she was not so far off but that I could see in her face that the *feeling herself alone aboard the ship frightened her a good deal*.

although we were close-to and she could perceive what we were about. What time it was when we had hauled the raft into the position we required I don't know; the sun seemed to have climbed pretty high, and his rays poured down like molten silver upon our defenceless faces and bodies; moreover, I thought it would be pretty late by another sign—I mean my appetite. I felt the want of a breakfast, but, as I have said, every hour was precious, and nothing was more certain than that if we ever hoped to warp the ship afloat our first business was to take care that the action of the tide did not forge and gather her higher and more fixedly upon the reef. Then with a couple of capstan-bars, with which Nipper had taken care to provide us, we prized the anchor out of the raft, and down it sank, carrying its end of the hawser with it; and so, having done this, we returned to the ship.

"We want to make a sailor of you, Miss Inglefield," said I.

"I will do anything I can," she answered.

"Nipper will tell you what is wanted."

He wiped his fiery-red face, and said, "It's that there rope, miss," pointing to the end of the hawser that lay in turns over the winch. "We'll ask you to lay hold of that part there and just put the weight of your body against it by pulling whilst Mr. Aubyn and me rewolves them handles. The object is that the hawser mayn't slip as we rouse it taut."

"I can easily do that," she answered, evidently delighted to be asked to do something that was practicable to her.

"Won't you put on your gloves?" said Nipper, as she took up the heavy rope. "They'll not be like frozen mits on a man's hands reefing tops'ls off the Horn. Ye'll be able to hold on with them."

No, she would not put on her gloves; she was not afraid of spoiling her fingers; and in a moment there she was, with her little hands looking like snow-flakes on the brand-new manilla strands, and her very charming figure showing to perfection as she leaned away from the winch, with her small feet planted firm upon the deck. Nipper and I now manned the winch, and by sweating at it with all our might we hove the hawser fairly taut and then put a stopper on it, threw it off the winch (which we should presently require), and took a turn with it—ready, in case the ship should float, to haul her off into deeper water. By this time we were quite ready for breakfast; and as we did not want to bother over lighting the galley fire merely for the sake of getting a pot of tea which we should have to drink without milk, we descended into the cabin, where we knocked the head off a bottle of wine, and this, with filtered water and plenty of white biscuit, cold ham, and the remains of some salt beef, furnished us with quite as much nourishment as we required to go to work upon.

I have a lively recollection of that breakfast, mainly because of the contrast it set up. It was not so long since when those tables held the Edwardses and the Inglefields, Pipes, with his

strange square face, the two mates, and little Hornby. They had all passed away as figures moving in a dream, and now for company in that same cabin the most delicate and fragile-looking of us all—I mean Miss Agnes—and myself had a rough, hairy, crimson-faced, alley-sort of sailor, with the perspiration glittering on his mossy breast like dew on a bramble-tree, his arms naked to the massy muscle that rose up like eggs every time he bent his elbow to bring his fist to his mouth, and his hair lying wild and unparted over his brow and behind his ears. We were amazingly light-hearted considering our situation. The work we had done made the prospect of our escaping by means of the ship seem a real thing—such as no amount of mere talking about it could have enabled us to realize to the same extent. We drank to our chances; we toasted the stranded hooker; we discussed how we two men were to navigate her when she should yield to the winch and slide off her coral bed; and all this without considering that before this time to-morrow there might be wind enough blowing to scatter her bones to the four quarters of the ocean, and to leave us on the sandbank, with nothing but the raft alongside between sure starvation there and such chances as might come by our committing ourselves to the deep in that loose and unprotected structure of deals! But we were right, nevertheless. Many a victory has been won by starting on the struggle with the notion that triumph is certain. What is first of all most wanted in this world for achievement is nerve; and the only way to maintain its due tension is to keep the sunshine of hope upon it, for it is one of those physical things which grow slack and useless in gloom as surely as any plant does that is deprived of light.

And now what remains to be told of this part of our Strange Voyage would prove so tedious were it narrowly detailed, that no one would take the trouble to read it, for which I should be sorry. It is, indeed, a mere narrative of toil, and for that reason it must be condensed. The ship, as you know, was held by the anchor we had laid out astern, and the next thing to be done was to lighten her. This we at once set about after breakfast. We got a block on to the mainstay over the hatch, and through it we rove a whip, to one end of which we attached one of the tubs Nipper had contrived, whilst we took the other end to the winch. Then, armed with a shovel, Nipper descended into the hold, filled the bucket with ballast, which I raised by means of the winch, Miss Agnes as before holding on to the line as it came in; then, when I had got it to a certain height, I ran it to the side, and emptied and lowered it afresh. Any sailor will understand me; and a fuller explanation would not help the landsman; though, let me tell you, it was slow work at first, because it took Miss Agnes some time to learn how to “slack away” when I wanted to get the tub to the side to capsize the contents overboard. Besides,

to render her part of the work possible to her, we had to rig up a shelter from the sun over her head; and yet, in spite of many delays and "knocking off," as sailors say, for meals and spells of rest, we managed to empty a great number of tubs of ballast before the sun sank that night. There was no sign of the least change of weather. The sea shone like a lake around the dazzle of the sandbanks and the ripples which trembled along the reef to the coral dust; it was no more than a glorious mirror for the perfections of the day which few clouds ever obscured, though now and again a length of pearly film might be seen melting out in the south, and once the sun went down in a line of low mountainous vapour that boiled up red as furious fire where he was; but it sank and disappeared when the stars came out. Yet as I plied the winch and ran the full tub to the side, I was for ever glancing around for the change I dreaded to behold. Any wind of sufficient strength to agitate the water enough to rock the vessel would have utterly ruined our prospects by crowding her submerged part with leaks, and it was the fear of this that kept one's eye wandering even in the midst of engrossing talk or in the full of the deep fatigue that followed hard work rendered desperately excessive by the great heat. I never expected, if the ship meant to float at all, that she would come off under the discharge of less than a hundred tons of ballast, and this was not to be managed in less than three long working days, let us strive as we might. But we had not got rid of more than sixty tons when, it being high tide, Nipper threw down his shovel, and came out of the hold. It was the forenoon—the exact hour I cannot remember—and we had been throwing over ballast for two days. The sailor having asked me the time, and then singing out, "It'll be flood tide, then," came up out of the hold streaming with perspiration, for not only was the interior of the ship like a room heated by furnaces, but the ballast consisted of lumps of rock or stone, as well as finer material, and was very heavy stuff to shovel up. He stood looking at the ship a minute, and said, "She's upright, anyways."

"Yes," I answered, "as upright as it's possible to fix her with the eye."

"It'll be a mistake," said he, "to chuck out more ballast than's needed. We don't want to make her too tender, or there'll be no sailin' her at all. She ain't afloat," he continued, looking at the hawser that ran taut astern, "for if she wur, there's strain enough there to heave her back'ards and bring the hawser slack. But I'll tell 'ee what, Mr. Aubyn; a heave or two might do it, and, if you don't object, we'll try our hands at it." So saying, he ran forward to ease off our shore-rope—I mean the line betwixt the sandbank and the vessel—and then, after bringing the hawser to *the winch* and letting go the stopper, he seized hold of one *winch-handle*, I of the other, whilst Miss Agnes as before held the slack *of the hawser* with her weight leaning from it. e

"Altogether!" bawled Nipper, hoarsely. We set our teeth and ground at the handles. Not a stir! they were not to be moved by the fiftieth part of an inch.

"Heave!" cried Nipper; and I echoed, "Heave!" straining till I had like to have burst every breakable vessel in me.

"Once again!" roared Nipper, jumping to t'other side his handle, and dropping his whole dead weight upon it. This time there was a sensible movement. It might, indeed, be no more than the stretching of the hawser or the anchor coming home. But it filled us with hope and gave us new strength, and, after Nipper had dropped the hand-lead over the side, plumb with the rail, that we might see by the angle of the line whether the ship was coming off or not, we reapplied ourselves to the winch. Then there followed some more tremendous straining on our part; in a few moments we got the eighth of a turn of the handles; "Heave!" shrieked Nipper; another eighth of a turn, then half a turn, and from that moment the winch revolved as easily as if we had been hoisting the tubs of ballast out of the ship.

Nipper let go his handle, and rushed to the ship's side where the lead-line lay. He took one look, and then, roaring out. "Afloat Mr. Aubyn! we're afloat, by thunder!" he sprang back to his post wild with excitement, yelling, "Heave! heave! till we get the hawser up and down and her head well out of it!" and forthwith the winch-paul rattled like hail on glass to our working, whilst Miss Inglefield laid the wet slack of the thick rope down as it came in through her little, delicate, eager fingers. Something held us; it was the raft-line attached to the ship and the shore-upright. In a breath Nipper bounded forward, cast the end adrift, and in a few minutes the vessel lay afloat clear of the reef, and with a dry hold, and her head slowly swinging to the north and east to the grip of the hawser over her stern. I was half mad with joy, yet too much moved to speak. I grasped Nipper's hand in both of mine, and held them, looking into his face; and at this moment I see again the wet glistening that came into his honest eyes out of sympathy with my own deep emotion and delight at our success. But we were not yet out of danger.

"We mustn't think of resting yet, sir," he exclaimed; "God knows where the wind is; it's an Irishman's hurricane, I'm afraid; but the tide'll carry her clean, and we must stand by to let slip the hawser when she's canted her head a bit more."

And yet there was a faint draught of air too, blowing, if it blew at all, from south-west; it was more like a sucking in of the atmosphere than a current, yet you saw it in the light flickering of the masthead vane and in little spaces of shadow upon the otherwise breathless sea. I called Nipper's attention to the vane, and said, "There must be a stir in the air aloft; there's nothing to loose up there, the topsails are easily swung, and we can sheet home the light canvas till we've put all the safety we need 'twixt the ship and this cursed reef."

"Right, sir!" he replied; "but let's liberate the ship first." He ran forward, and very quickly returned with the carpenter's axe, with which he immediately let fly at the hawser, saying, half-breathless with his exertions, "It 'ud be a pity to lose the whole length of this manilla. The anchor's of course bound to go. And besides, who's a going to pay all these here fathoms overboard when the ship's scarce got way, and there's weight enough to keep her standin'?" and with a final crash of the axe the anchor-end of the severed hawser disappeared. This being done, we dragged the yards round so as to trim the topsails (which, as you will remember, were set) to the direction of the faint draught that was moving aloft; then sheeted home the topgallant sails and royals and hoisted the yards, bringing the ropes to the winch whenever we found the work too heavy for us, whilst Miss Agnes held the wheel in the position needful to keep the ship steady; and by that time being fairly exhausted by the long and heavy toil we had been at since dawn, we went aft, panting and streaming, there to rest ourselves and watch the movement of the ship. It was not long before that movement grew sufficiently defined to enable us to understand that once more old ocean was fairly before us, and that, if further peril menaced us, the Roccas would not be in it any way. Very slowly but very surely that fatal reef, with its small dazzling stretches of sand, and the rock past the blue horizon, and the stores which had been landed darkening a short space of the white fringe, dropped away on our starboard quarter. Nipper leaned against the wheel looking at it; Miss Agnes, standing by my side, watched it with fixed eyes full of tears; whilst I, overwhelmed by our sudden and wonderful preservation from the horrors of the raft or the more dreadful terrors of a brief existence upon the island, barely dimly realized that what had happened was true, and could, of all that was passing, only understand that our thanks were due to Almighty God for conducting us out of our horrible situation of distress.

"Well, Mr. Aubyn," said Nipper, slowly, and feeling for a plug of tobacco; "there goes as big a danger as ever a man came mirackerously clear of. If there's any more wonders to happen, what I says is, let 'em be postponed for another woyage; we've all had our gutsfull o' sailorisin', I reckon; and my respectful wote now is that we go straight home."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE VOYAGE ENDS.

EXACTLY twenty days from the date of our warping the *Silver Sea* off the Roccas reef a large, powerful ocean steamship of between two and three thousand tons burden floated slowly into Plymouth

Sound to land mails, specie, and passengers. I stood on the deck of that ship, with Agnes Inglefield at my side, and we surveyed together a scene that we might have quitted but yesterday in point of impression, though in respect of experience ten years might well have elapsed since we had last beheld it. The sun stood high, and his light shone gloriously down upon the beautiful stretch of English water. Mount Edgecumbe and the adjacent and opposite shores still wore their summer livery; Drake's Island stood with a frosted silver-like tint on it upon the calm surface; Cattwater lay as white as the sunlight, and reflected with the purity and brilliance of a mirror the various craft which lay at anchor upon its breast, or glided under the propulsion of the oar from one fairy-like shore to another; the shipping in the docks lifted their delicate tracery to the sky; there were many people walking on the bright-green Hoe; up Hamoaze the triple breasts of an old line-of-battle ship dotted the water under her with the checkering of the black ports; and all about the Sound, both on this and on the other side of the breakwater, were many vessels sailing, steaming, or at rest, completing to my memory the picture of placid English beauty I had carried away with me when the *Silver Sea* turned her back upon this favoured bit of coast.

And how came we two here—in Plymouth Sound again—home once more after as strange a voyage as was ever made? Well, you may easily suppose how it happened. God alone knows how it was managed; but for two days and two long nights Nipper and I, helped by Miss Agnes, who assisted us by holding the wheel, managed to navigate the ship in the direction, as I made it by the chart, of Pernambuco. I went aloft with the seaman, and helped him to furl the royals and topgallant sails, for the ballast we had hove out of her had made her crank—as, indeed, we found out when the faint draught that had helped us away from the reef freshened into a gentle breeze; and since it was necessary to prevent against capsizing from a sudden squall or a quick increase in the weight of the wind, we held the ship under topsails and inner jib only all the while, day and night, keeping a wild look-out for a sail. For that was our main hope. It was not only that I had no faith in my power for heading fair for Pernambuco, and that I was in constant dread of finding ourselves in some dark hour close on to a dangerous part of the Brazilian coast with a strong inshore wind blowing; I had not the professional knowledge nor yet the physical strength to back Nipper to the extent he needed. Two sailors after the pattern of my companion might have managed, but one was not enough when he could count upon no better help than I could give him. So, as I say, we all three of us kept an earnest and eager look-out for ships, with the ensign always ready on the taffrail for hoisting union down; but for two days and two nights we sighted nothing—steering all that time due south, so as to give Cape Agostinho a wide berth, which made it a frightfully weary and

anxious passage to me ; or I'd sometimes wonder whether it was possible we were in a navigated part of the ocean, since, if we were *not*, then I reckoned that the waters we were in were bound to be dangerous, and whether on deck or whether below, I made myself miserable with misgivings and alarm.

However, on the morning of the third day, soon after we had breakfasted, mounting the main rigging by a few ratlines to take a look around the horizon, I spied the smoke of a steamer right ahead. We waited to make sure she was not crossing our hawse, and then, finding that she was approaching us direct, we at once hoisted the ensign as a distress signal and backed the maintopsail yards. She came along at a great speed, and proved to be a long, large ocean passenger steamer, barque rigged, with two black funnels and a very pretty cutwater. Awnings shadowed her decks fore and aft, and a number of passengers watched us from over the rail. She steamed to abreast of us, quite close, which enabled me to sing out as much of our story as sufficed to induce them to send a boat. I went on board, and was taken by the captain into his cabin, where I told him our adventures ; and then, finding that the steamer was bound home, I asked him to give Miss Inglefield and me a passage, and to put a crew aboard the *Silver Sea*, as she was a good ship with a fairish amount of private property in her, and would pay his company for her salving. To all this he readily consented, and three-quarters of an hour after we had sighted the steamer Miss Inglefield and I were in her, with such traps as we thought necessary to bring, whilst the crew that had been put into the *Silver Sea* in charge of the steamer's third mate were making sail upon her, helped by Nipper, who had been required by the master of the steamer to keep with the ship, and of whom Miss Inglefield and I took a cordial and, I may say, an affectionate farewell, though I was careful, before letting fall the honest fellow's hand, to exact a promise from him that he would call upon me in London immediately upon his arrival.

Thus I summarize this part of my story, for to tell you fact by fact, how we worked the ship, how we lived, how we kept watch, what we talked about, how we cooked our food and the like, until we met the homeward-bound steamer, would only fatigue you by carrying you to a great extent over ground already traversed in this yarn ; whilst as to the run home in the *Mohican* (that was her name), why, you must very well know what steamers are, and how little they yield a man to write about in the shape of adventure ; for as a rule, whenever they *do* plump into something really exciting, such as a collision, a stranding, or anything of that kind, it is to be usually observed that they never leave anybody alive to tell the tale. *But in Plymouth Sound* what rose uppermost in our minds—and it *had been* our frequent theme during the passage, and much debated by the passengers also, who, you may be quite sure, were immensely interested in Miss Agnes and me—was, had anything been heard

of the occupants of the two boats who had rowed aboard the wreck? The dread that bad news was in store for her was strong in Miss Agnes ; I watched it working in her face, as she glanced around the sunny scene out of which not many weeks before we had sailed under the brave and brilliant apparel of our clipper ship, with hearts elated by the hope of a gay and healthful cruise. But there was nothing I dared venture to whisper to comfort her. We were too near home, too near to where we should hear the truth, good or bad, for that. It was possible, indeed, that if the surviving boat had been picked up by a sailing ship outward-bound, weeks might pass before any report of the circumstances could reach us ; but I keenly felt that if there was no news of them when we arrived, I should feel strongly disposed to fear that the worst had befallen them, just as I had no doubt it had befallen such of them as had occupied the capsized boat we encountered near the wreck.

Well, in due course a tender from the docks came alongside, we bade farewell to the captain and officers of the *Mohican*, and those of the passengers who were continuing the passage up Channel, and within the space of an hour Miss Inglefield and I were located—I'll not say comfortably, for a worse, a more expensive house I never stayed in—in a big hotel, from which immediately on our arrival I despatched some telegrams, one of which was to Harley Street, and another to an aunt of Miss Agnes, who, she told me, was taking charge of her papa's house during his absence. It would have been easy for me to reach London that night ; but Miss Agnes lived near Southampton. It was necessary that I should see her home, anyway ; and I for one could not very well move from where I was until I had heard from London, for the very simple reason that I was without finances, the Finn and his colleagues having cleared me of every pound I had with me ; and I did not think it worth while to risk to a landlord, or to anybody else who was a stranger to me, such a proffer as a cheque drawn up on a piece of blank paper. The time passed. I had ordered dinner for two ; I had accompanied Miss Agnes in a stroll on to the Hoe, that was very conveniently near ; we had then returned, and were eating our dinner, when a waiter came in with a telegram addressed to her.

It was from her father ! and ran thus : "THANK GOD, YOU ARE SAFE ; YOUR MOTHER AND I WILL FETCH YOU TO-MORROW."

Miss Agnes was as white as a sheet. She looked at me, holding her breath, till I thought her heart had stopped beating ; then with a wild hysterical laugh she burst into a passion of tears, and continued crying in a most extravagant fashion, though I was glad to see it, for I fancy it saved her from fainting away, or something worse, indeed. There was nobody in the coffee-room but ourselves and a couple of German waiters, who were good enough not to appear to notice the young lady's emotion. No doubt they were used to telegrams producing such results in people arriving from

or going to the great steamers which called at their port ; and so the outbreak passed off pretty easily.

"Now," said I, after I had flourished a bit over the good news, "henceforth I may hope that my predictions will command your confidence. Didn't I throughout advise you to hope and believe that your father and mother were in the *other* boat?"

She dried her pretty blue eyes and answered, "Yes, you did ; but oh ! where will the others be—dear Mr. Edwards, and poor, beautiful, noble Margaret——?"

A waiter with another telegram, this time addressed to me, stopped her. I tore open the envelope and read :

"Edwards, Harley St., to P. Aubyn, Esq.—Hotel, Plymouth.

"ALL SAFE : THANK HEAVEN, YOU TWO ARE. WHERE'S THE 'SILVER SEA'?"

This news fearfully excited me, for I remember bursting into as loud an hysterical laugh as ever Miss Agnes delivered, and then, to cover the confusion excited in me by the astonished looks of the waiters, of whom there were now four in the room, I cried, "How the good news pours in ! But that question about the *Silver Sea* ? Is not little Hornby spending the evening with Edwards ? I trace his hand in that interrogation. But upon my word, it's an enormous ending, a more wonderful conclusion than I could have dared to dream of or even pray for—after that capsized boat. 'All safe !' Well, God be thanked ! The noble Margaret is alive—and I wonder," I exclaimed, breaking into another half-hysterical laugh, "how Mr. Edwards's gout is?"

Whether Miss Agnes slept well that night, I cannot say ; for my part, I scarcely closed my eyes. It was not only a circumstance to fairly prostrate the mind that I should find myself resting on a mattress in a Plymouth hotel, with the sounds of locomotives' whistles in the air, and the rumbling of cabs and the striking of the bells of the church clocks, when it seemed but a day or two ago that I had given myself and companions up for lost, and contemplated our fate as likely to prove one of two issues : either starving and dying upon Nipper's raft, or contributing to the stock of human bones which already sanctified and yet made dreadful likewise the glaring sand of the northern Roccas bank ;—I say it was not only this that kept me too full of thought and humble thankfulness and awe to sleep ; it was the telegrams we had received, the announcement that "all were safe ;" and how *that* was to be reconciled with the capsized boat of the *Silver Sea*, I could not for the life of me imagine, unless it was as I had once supposed—that the boat having overset, all hands got into the other one. But would not such a crowd bring her so deep as to make her preservation in the *smallest* seaway an impossible feat ? and besides, being without water and provisions, how in the world had that numerous company managed ?

Well, after lunch next day I returned to the hotel from a turn in the town, whither I had gone to buy some articles of attire, and on entering the coffee-room to see if there were any letters or telegrams for me, I spied at the extreme end of the big apartment Colonel Inglefield and his wife and Mr. Hornby and Miss Agnes at table, the three former hard at work at a joint of cold beef. I ran up to them; and if it was not a meeting to make amends, yet Hornby's grip of the hand, Mrs. Inglefield's tearful shriek of thanks to me for my behaviour to her child, and the colonel's roared-out salutation, accompanied by such a wringing of both of my fists as was enough to cause me to think of him for long afterwards as an immensely powerful nerve-magnet, and made me feel wonderfully hearty and happy. I sat down with them all and then began—what shall I call it? a talk? Well, about as much a *talk* as a frigate's broadside would be a discharge of musketry. For many minutes it was all roaring on the part of the colonel, all vociferation on the part of Hornby, all hysteric interrogation on the part of Mrs. Inglefield, all inconsequential bawling on my part in the utterly useless endeavour to answer a volley of questions all at once. But the Inglefields were hungry—they had made a long journey; Hornby was also hungry, having in his hurry to catch a certain train that would land him at Plymouth much about the time that the Inglefields reached there, forgotten to eat any breakfast; so after a bit they fell to again, and then there was much less noise.

"You were at Mr. Edwards's last night, then," said I to Hornby, "when he got my telegram?"

"Yes," said he, "and I at once wired to the colonel to tell him I should be here to-day, and got his reply saying at what hour he expected to arrive."

"Then Edwards's question about the *Silver Sea* was yours?" I exclaimed, laughing.

"Well, I was anxious," he replied, with a little blush. "What's become of her, Aubyn?"

"Oh, curse the *Silver Sea*!" roared the colonel. "Of course I hope she's afloat, for the sake of Hornby; but if she's not at the bottom, let's leave her alone for the present, will you, Hornby, damn it, man, till we hear how Aubyn's and my daughter's lives have been spared?"

Here Mrs. Inglefield rushed round the table, and flung her arm round Miss Agnes's neck, and they both cried heartily together; whilst Hornby said, "Curse the *Silver Sea* too, say I; but money's money, and insurance and all that sort of thing, don't you know, is worth a question, colonel, especially when a man's poor; and besides, there's Edwards's and your luggage to think about. But how were ye saved, Aubyn; how were ye saved?" and sideways dropped his little head in the old cock-sparrow fashion. Mrs. Inglefield resumed her place, with her cheeks disclosing several little channels where the current of her tears had flowed down through

her complexion, and I began my yarn. It took me half an hour. There was certainly a wonderful lot to relate when it came to beginning at the moment when the fog hid the wreck down to the time when Miss Agnes and I found ourselves aboard the *Mohican*. I told them how we had dodged about till we sighted the wreck, and how our meeting with the capsized boat satisfied us that a portion of the party had perished; how I had boarded the wreck, and discovered no relic left nor sign of them; how the remainder of the crew, without exactly mutinying, had exhibited a morose, savage, and discontented spirit. I also told them of the mysterious disappearance of Captain Pipes, and how neither Miss Agnes nor Nipper nor I had the least doubt that he had been flung overboard by Grondhal, either alone or with the help of others of the men; and I then entered upon a complete account of the rest of our voyage—the gale, the northwards heading of the ship, in spite of my injunctions, by (as I took it) the orders of the Finn; the stranding of the *Silver Sea* on the Roccas; the rifling of her cabins; the sailing away of the plunderers in the only boat, leaving the three of us to our fate upon the sand bank; our getting the ship afloat; and our transference, after a term of bitter anxiety, aboard the *Mohican*.

I would prefer to leave the reception of this story to your imagination. A whole volume might be devoted to the colonel's wrath when he learnt that his luggage had been pulled to pieces and all the jewellery and money stolen; to Mrs. Inglefield's exclamations and interruptions, and short, uncomfortable shrieks; to Hornby's denunciations of the Finn and his associates, and his violent asseverations that "let them hide themselves where they pleased, he'd bring 'em to justice yet, and force 'em to disgorge, and all that sort of thing, don't you know." However, the ship was saved, and that tended to comfort the soul of the little man; whilst, after a bit, Mrs. Inglefield came to the conclusion that on the whole it might have been worse—they might have stolen her sealskin and a quantity of lace, not to mention some silk dresses and several beautiful fans.

"And now," said I, addressing Mr. Hornby, "will you tell me how the dickens *you* were all saved?"

"In a jiffy!" he answered, in his bright, quick, bird-like way. "When we saw the fog we made a rush for the boats; but the colonel cried out, 'For God's sake let's stop where we are. We may lose both the wreck and the ship in the fog; let's wait till it thins;' and Edwards saying the same thing, we kept the boat's fast and waited."

"And wasn't I right, confound it?" roared the colonel.

"No doubt," I replied.

"Well," continued Hornby, "the wind drove over us thick as mud; and with it came a breeze which made the chief mate shake his head, for he told me in a whisper that, if it freshened, the *Silver*

Sea would be blown away, and Pipes might have great difficulty in recovering us, if ever he did so. It *did* freshen, as you know, Aubyn. How we passed the night, God knows. Again and again we thought the wreck was sinking. Such a wreck as it was, too—a right contrivance for converting men into skeletons !”

“Oh, Mr. Hornby—if you please!” gasped Mrs. Inglefield, fanning herself with a napkin in her gushing way.

“But next morning, Aubyn,” said Hornby, “we sighted the smoke of a steamer ; on which the sailors turned to and made up a fire of oakum and canvas and the like, that sent up some thickish fumes, and all that sort of thing, don’t you know——?”

“For we had no other means of making our misery known,” shouted the colonel, “being without masts or poles.”

“And the steamer,” continued Hornby, “slightly altering her course, approached us close. She was a cargo vessel, and she took us on board.”

“Such dreadful cabins, Agnes !” cried Mrs. Inglefield ; “full of cockroaches and *worse*, my dear.”

“Took us on board,” said Hornby, scratching his nose. “We went to her in our own boats. The master, being an economically minded man—and I must say I like captains who have that disposition—determined to save the boats, and one was securely hoisted on board ; but the tackles employed to raise the other one in some way broke down, and the boat fell into the water wrong side up. The captain would not stay to right her, and so we proceeded on our voyage to London, leaving her behind.”

“Humph !” I exclaimed, with a look at Miss Agnes. “I wish I had known of all this three weeks ago ; it would have saved me some grey hairs.”

So this was their story ; and when I had heard it I remembered having seen the smoke of a steamer not far from the wreck—though I had observed no remains of the fire they had made on the derelict—and reflected that I must have been an ass not to have suspected that that steamer had taken the people off. But when the event has happened, one always sees and understands about it so easily ! Then we talked of Pipes again. We had much to say about him, and Mrs. Inglefield was for holding that he had made away with himself, because her daughter told her that he had become strange in his mind after the wreck had been sighted and found abandoned ; but the others agreed with me that the probability lay in the Finn having murdered him ; and mightily concerned little Hornby seemed for a bit, though it was but an item in a chain of circumstances much too numerous and stirring to let any single feature stand out conspicuously.

“And now what remains to be told ? This yarn is surely long enough, and what more of it do you want to hear ? On my arrival in London, the first person I called upon was Edwards,
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as you may suppose. With him was his daughter, and our talk was all about our Strange Voyage. Heavens ! how I admired the beautiful and stately Margaret when I saw her ! She seemed to have gained in majesty and nobleness since we had met ; and she was so bland, so tender in her inquiries ! and if Agnes Inglefield had been her sister she could not have inquired after her more affectionately.

"Surely," said Edwards, with his fine, ample smile, "you must have lost your heart to her during your thrillingly adventurous association?"

"I did lose my heart to her," I replied.

"And are you engaged?" asked Miss Edwards, sweetly.

"Well, yes," said I.

"I expected as much!" cried Edwards, bursting into a hearty peal of laughter. "What could such adventures as yours and hers result in but *that*?"

"True," said I, demurely, with a glance at his beautiful daughter ; but at that time I never thought I should write the story of our voyage, otherwise I might have replied to his question as to whether I was engaged to Agnes, "Wait till you read my book. You will then judge by the manner in which I have written of Mrs. Inglefield that she could be nothing else but my mother-in-law."

Yet another item. Some weeks after I had arrived in England, Nipper called upon me. They had brought the *Silver Sea* home, he said, after a long voyage, owing to her tenderness, which obliged them to carry very small sail. I entertained him as an old shipmate and friend, and when I shook him by the hand I put a fifty-pound note into it, bidding him pocket it in Miss Inglefield's name and mine. Had I been a richer man, I would have given him a deal more than that. He took it, read it, and looked bewildered.

"Well, Mr. Aubyn," said he, "all I can say is, God bless ye and the young lady!"

I never saw the poor honest fellow again.

And Pipes? was he murdered, or had he committed suicide? When a matter gets into the newspapers, you are pretty sure to hear of it. The shipping journals were sheets I never saw, having no interest in maritime commerce ; and hence, if it hadn't been for little Hornby, who *five years* after our Strange Voyage sent me the subjoined cutting from a Liverpool journal, I must certainly have ended my days without in the faintest degree being able to make sure whether Pipes had died by his own act or had been thrown into the sea :—

"CONFESSION OF MURDER.—Advices from Callao state that an Austrian ship arrived at that port having on board a Russian Finn, named Grondhal, who was ill with fever. He was conveyed ashore to the hospital, where; becoming delirious, he talked in

such a manner as to satisfy those who attended him that he had been guilty of murder and robbery some years before on board a vessel named the *Silver Sea*. He regained consciousness, but owing to complications set up by the fever, no hope of his recovery was entertained. On being informed of this, and on being questioned as regarded his delirious statements respecting the *Silver Sea*, he showed extreme agitation, and for a long time refused to speak ; but eventually he confessed as follows"—(here was given an account of how his vessel had collided with another, and how he had been picked up, whilst clinging to the long boat, by the *Silver Sea*)—"that when the passengers and most of the crew were lost in the wreck they went aboard of, the German under-steward of the *Silver Sea* got talking to him about the value of the passengers' property that was in the cabin. This gave him the idea of stealing what was portable of that property, and scuttling the ship or running her ashore. Then he said that Captain Pipes threatened him on one occasion with a pistol, which made him determined to destroy him if he could ; not more out of revenge than because he foresaw the difficulty of getting his own way whilst the master remained in the ship. One night he was at the wheel ; the men were sleeping forward ; Captain Pipes had been excitedly walking up and down the quarter-deck, gesticulating with his hands as though addressing some invisible person. He went below and shortly after returned, and going up to the Finn, he pulled a revolver out of his breast and asked him what he meant by his mutinous conduct. Grondhal, who was a tall powerful man, made a dash at the pistol, wrested it out of Captain Pipes's hand, and threw it overboard. On this the captain grasped him by the throat, and the Finn, being enraged to madness, and impelled also by his desire to get possession of the ship, or rather the passengers' valuables in her, ran him to the rail—the captain was a short and in no sense powerful man—and threw him into the sea."

The narrative then proceeded with the stranding of the *Silver Sea* on the Rocas. This, it seems, was not intended by the Finn, whose real object in getting the others to luff the ship to the nor'rards, when I and Nipper were below or were unobservant of their conduct, was that she might make the land off San Roque, where she could be abandoned and the plunder landed without risk of detection. No information was given as to how Grondhal and his party contrived to get ashore with what they had stolen, nor what part of the Brazilian coast they had managed to fetch. The newspaper paragraph concluded with the statement that the man died two days after he had made the above confession.

So this Strange Voyage ends, and I hope to your satisfaction, since it clears up the mystery of Pipes's death, and exhibits the rest of us ashore and at home safe and sound. It would be easy to fill out another chapter with a description of my marriage to Agnes Inglefield, with various interspersions respecting the

beautiful Margaret Edwards (who became the wife, not of little Hornby, as I had sometimes fancied might be that gracious and handsome woman's destiny, but of Sir William Maldon, Bart., of Cressy Castle, Northumberland), and of my frequent visits at Harley Street, where at dinner and other parties, which often included the Inglefields and Hornby, we would talk over our adventures and hear without fatigue for the twentieth time Mr. Edwards's laughable description of his feelings when, the fog having rolled down and hidden the *Silver Sea*, he looked little Hornby in the face and made his cheeks as white as the vapour was by the simple exclamation of—

"Hornby, we are dead men. Let us not needlessly alarm ourselves; every man's period of extinction is dated; and, as things are, we have no right to doubt but that we are within a few hours of being corpses."

And his rheumatic gout? did the voyage, so far as it went, cure him? No; because there was not enough of it. Had he made another attempt to reach the Cape—and I implored him to do so, but he told me he would see me, &c., first—he would have returned sound; instead of which he conceived a violent hatred of the ocean, reverted to colchicum and iodide of potassium, and at this hour halts through life like Le Sage's devil—on two sticks.

THE END.

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